

**Imaginative
Tales**

ACTION-PACKED SCIENCE FICTION

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MAY, 1956

GATEWAY TO INFINITY

by Darius John Granger



Introducing the



AUTHOR



Forrest J. Ackerman

(SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE)



SCIENCE FICTION is 30 years old this year. I wish I could say the same. Since I came upon the sci-fi scene when I was 9, you can figure for yourself how old that makes me. I wonder if Jack Benny is a fan?

700 words to cover 30 years of s. f. activity: that's about 25 words per year. It would take me that many just to list the new friends I make annually. Even if I just called them by their first name. 125 friends came to my recent 39th birthday party.

The first s. f. mag I read was *Amazing Stories*, October 1926; the first s. f. story, part one of A. Hyatt Verrill's "Beyond the Pole." I regret I never met Verrill. I shall always be glad I met H. G. Wells, A. Merritt, Edgar

Rice Burroughs, Austin Hall, Frank R. Paul, Hugo Gernsback, Fritz Lang, Brigitte Helm and (all of these last 5 still living) S. Fowler Wright.

Today when I read for pleasure I look for something by Clarke, Russell, the Kuttners, Bradbury, Sturgeon, Knight, Leiber and Kornbluth & Pohl. Of them all, some of the works that stand out in my memory as having given me the greatest satisfaction include THE WORLD BELOW, CHILDHOOD'S END, SLAN, THE PUPPET MASTERS (could use more van Vogt and Heinlein today), TO WALK THE NIGHT, DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT, SIRIUS, SINISTER BARRIER,

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MAY 1956

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NEW AND
COMPLETE

Imaginative Tales

William L. Hamling
Editor

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The Editorial.....

WE had occasion to attend a meeting of the local Ground Observer Corps the other evening. We had a particular interest in attending this meeting because it had been announced there would be a "Flying Saucer" lecture. Being an old flying saucer hound we had to sniff around and see what startling bits of info were to be divulged. We were quite disappointed.

THE speaker turned out to be a school teacher who kept insisting he was there not to convince anyone either pro or con on the subject, but simply to "lay the facts" before his audience and let them draw their own conclusions. He emphasized that for himself he had "an open mind" on the matter, neither believing or disbelieving what he had to say. He said little.

THE evening ground on with what amounted to a series of book reviews; the speaker simply quoted or commented on a number of books written around the flying saucer mystery. There's no point in going into them here—or anywhere else for that matter. Flying saucer books are written and published for only one reason: to make the author and the publisher a little bit of the 'long green. And we don't mean little men.

FACT of the matter is that nobody—and we do mean everybody—knows the answer to the

flying saucer reports. Those who say they are results of natural phenomena are just as premature in their conclusions as those who assert the saucers are secret military projects or visitors from another world. Up to now there has been no proof to point to any definite conclusion.

POINT is, we find it difficult to accept this "open mind" business on any controversial subject. And certainly the flying saucers have held their own in a world of controversy. Anybody with half a light year of self-respect has formed an opinion, and if he's half a man to boot he'll stick his big fat head out on a limb and let the opposition snipe away.

LIKE us. We have a definite opinion on the subject. And we like to let that opinion be known because even though we can't prove it we *know* we're right.

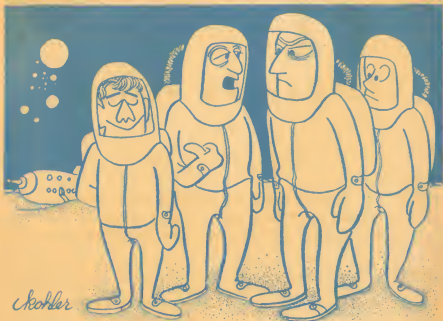
WE were in on this business right from the start. Back in 1947 when we were editing AMAZING STORIES with Ray Palmer a guy named Kenneth Arnold sighted what he called a string of "flying saucers" over Mount Ranier. We promptly used the financial facilities of AS (which were considerable) to have Arnold follow through and try and track the mystery down. And not only Arnold. We followed up every lead with

every person even remotely connected with the "sightings" from that time on. The offices of *Amazing Stories* became a kind of international headquarters for flying saucer business.

WE received reliable information by the ream. We received crackpot information by the carload. We also received visits from the FBI and the highly secret Central Intelligence Agency. Out of it all we received one great big headache of confusion. And, we feel quite certain, so did the FBI and the CIA. For all the reports—many by extremely reliable sources—there was nothing to prove within

even a shadow of doubt that the saucers were real. It's one thing to swear you saw something, it's another to produce the evidence. So far nobody has pulled a saucer out of his hip pocket.

BUT you can't swim in a sea of reports without coming up with an opinion—or conclusion. We're still swimming—as are the government agencies—but we believe we know the answer. We think the government does too.—The flying saucers are extra-terrestrial. As one day soon we will be. And whenever we talk on this subject we're not afraid to say so. Open fire when ready with



"Farber refuses patrol duty on religious grounds—he says he's a devout coward!"



Gateway To Infinity

by

Darius John Granger

Deep in space lay a hidden world where a man could gain immortality. Many would kill for such a secret — and Jeremy knew the girl held it!

THE UNDERTAKER was not an Earthman. He was a fat Vegan with the dead-white skin and pink eyes of his race. There was something almost

corpse-like about the undertaker himself, as if he had been too long in proximity with the corpses he prepared for burial or cremation or satellation. He had an annoying



way of rubbing his soft fat hands together and an unctuous smile as he said, -

"Ironical, is it not? Seeking an elixir of youth and life, your father finds only — death."

"Roger Armitage wasn't my father," Jeremy Armitage said. "My uncle."

"I see," responded the unctuous Vegan. "He was a great man nevertheless, I'm sure. Did you like the burial, young Earthman?"

Politely, Jeremy said that he liked the burial. Actually, the Vegan's staff had been hard-pressed to maintain the expected solemn atmosphere at the funeral of Jeremy's uncle since funerals are happy events for the Vegans, who firmly believe in transmigration of souls. Jeremy looked at the fat Vegan, who was obviously waiting for the proper moment to ask for payment. Sighing, Jeremy waited. He had no money. He was absolutely broke, and as far from his home in Sol System as the Vegan was from his home in Vega System. But the law here on Kadwon would range itself solidly behind the Vegan because an outworlder with money was preferred to one with empty pockets.

"I am glad that you found our ceremony and services satisfactory young Earthman," the Vegan said.

"Would you believe it, I have never been on Earth? But — neither here nor there. Would you also believe it, I consider it an honor, a decided honor, to have been allowed to do my small part in the speeding of your grandfather's —"

"He was my uncle."

"Uncle. Yes, to be sure. To have done my small part in speeding your Uncle's departed spirit toward its meeting with a new body, a new manifestation of physical being. But — oh, I see. Dear me, I have said the wrong thing again. Haven't I? You Earthmen do not believe in metempsychosis? If you will please forgive a garrulous old man? But you see, my dear young sir, these are the manifest advantages of my Vegan way of life. Your departed uncle journeys halfway across the galaxy to seek an elixir of youth, and perishes in the attempt, perishes at the hands of ruffians from another galactic world for the same purpose. Did you know, dear boy, that the people of Vega alone send no pilgrims here to the Gateway World of Kadwon to seek the elixir of youth? Do you know why?"

Jeremy said that he did not know why. He was grateful to prolong the conversation and delay the moment when he would have to admit that he could not pay for his uncle's burial.

"Because we of Vega believe in transmigration of souls, in metempsychosis. That's why. Dear boy, don't you understand? If indeed the soul migrates to another body upon death, what is the need for eternal youth? You see? Ah, you see?"

Jeremy said something polite, and waited. He groped awkwardly for a new conversational gambit but could find none in his limited knowledge of Vega or of Kadwon. He heard the fat Vegan clear his throat and say,

"Dear boy, I realize that at the time of your bereavement, since Earth harbors no small part of the true religion of metempsychosis, then—"

"The Hindus," Jeremy said, grateful again for the delay, "and the Buddhists, they believe in reincarnation."

"But they are not the ones who journey into space, surely? My dear boy, don't you see they hardly matter? But thank you, dear boy. It is a fact for this card-file I call a mind, a fact which an interstellar undertaker ought to possess. And your surrendering of this fact, free of charge as it were, makes it even more difficult for me to go through the mechanics and — heh, heh — formalities of presenting my bill for the services rendered by my modest organization." And, with this flow-

ery preamble, the Vegan offered Jeremy an envelope with an unsealed flap. When Jeremy made no move to open it, the fat undertaker said. "No need, no need. It is but a token payment, dear boy, for I considered it an honor to help speed your esteemed uncle on his way to whatever reward your religion has in store for him. A mere nothing. Four hundred credits for the service, and another three hundred for the equipment. Seven hundred in all, plus the Kadwon burial tax of a hundred and fifty and the Kadwon import tax for the casket. Of pure Earth yellow pine, you know. Only the finest. The very finest, dear boy. Another hundred and fifty. In all, the modest sum of one thousand credits."

JEREMY did not bother to purse his lips and whistle. Whistling would have been superfluous — especially since there would have been no real difference for him between a thousand credits and only a hundred. Jeremy could not have paid one, could not have paid a single, solitary interstellar credit. Jeremy was stone-broke. And, he thought with a sudden twinge of fright, friendless and unknown on an alien world fifty thousand light years from home.

Jeremy took a deep breath and said, "I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry, Por Konst."

"It is too much? Very well, dear boy, for you eight hundred credits."

"I'm sorry, it isn't that."

"Seven hundred. But I can go no lower. Already I lose money. Seven hundred credits for the deluxe burial!"

"No. You see —"

"Six hundred? But I shall be a flea-scratching rags picker for the rest of this creation"

"Listen," Jeremy said suddenly. "I'm broke. I haven't a credit. Not a credit, Por Konst."

"What?" roared the Vegan, no longer unctuous or fawning. "What? Not a credit? What? To allow me to believe that you are the son of a rich Earth merchant who —"

"I never said that. I'm an orphan. Uncle Roger was my guardian, although I hardly new him. I was just sent here from Earth by an aunt who no longer could support —"

"Your personal history doesn't interest me! I demand my money. The full thousand credits, Earthman. The full thousand credits if I must take them out in the sweat — no, the blood — of your —" Gasping, Por Konst the Vegan reached for a glass of water and sipped from it. Still gasping, he cried, "Do you know the Kadwonian rules and laws regarding refusal or inability to pay a legal debt?"

Jeremy shook his head. "But I'm a minor," he said hopefully.

"Minor? You? You have no guardian? You control your own destiny? You —"

"I'm nineteen. On Earth the age of twenty-one must be reached before one assumes full responsibility —"

"Well!" roared the Vegan. "On Earth, on Earth, is it? You think yourself on Earth? This is Kadwon, not Earth. This is the Gateway World, where people come from all over the galaxy, searching for the elixir of youth."

"I know. My uncle —"

"Is dead and must be paid for. Kadwonian law regards you as a responsible adult, I assure you. According to the law, I may employ you in any capacity I see fit, at whatever salary I decide, for whatever length of time I deem adequate to repay the debt. You insolent young dog, you never intended to pay a single credit, did you?"

"I had no money. Everything happened so fast. I didn't know . . . before I knew it, you were burying my uncle. I couldn't . . . I didn't . . ."

"Enough! I talked you into nothing. You start in my service immediately. Below, in the vaults of this building. Jo Lorgin, administrator will put you to work. Well, what are you waiting for?"

Go!"

Jeremy had caught glimpses of the Vegan undertaker's polyglot staff in the vaults and caverns which honeycombed the Kadwonian rock below the building. They looked like a legion of the damned, like forgotten souls working among the dead and half dead themselves. For the first time, it occurred to Jeremy that the Vegan probably procured most of his help that way, talking them into expensive burial services while they were dazed with bereavement, then all but enslaving them under the peculiar Kadwonian laws. And the Kadwonians, too busy reaping the profits from a million visitors yearly, come to find the elixir of youth, hardly made an attempt to enforce their laws. Which meant that they were laws for the strong alone and that a man in Por Konst's position could probably keep Jeremy in bondage for the rest of his life. But Jeremy had seen the law in question, and there was one faint hope. . .

"Wait a minute," he said. "The wording of the law gives me one Kadwonian day to find other employment and pay off the debt out of my wages, fifty per cent going to me and fifty per cent to you."

"There is no other employment to be had by a boy of Earth here on Kadwon, and you know it. You

merely want the extra day of freedom."

"It is my right."

"And my right to look for you all over Kadwon tomorrow?"

"I'll find a job. I'll pay you."

Por Konst bowed mockingly. "Then go. Go find a job where none exists for such as you. But may I remind you —" again the unctuous smile — "dear boy, that the Kadwonian penalty for willful refusal to repay a debt is death. In other words, if you do not return here of your own volition tomorrow—"

But Jeremy was no longer listening. He went outside into the bright light of Kadwon's three-sunned, perpetual day, and heard the Vegan's mocking laughter behind him.

Three alternatives, Jeremy thought. To find a job. To become Por Konst's slave. Or to die. Simple.

And no jobs were available on Kadwon.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS an enormous spaceship. It dwarfed even the series of liners which had carried Jeremy from Earth to Fomalhaut, from Fomalhaut to Deneb, from Deneb across subspace to the starclouds of Ophiuchus and along the rim of the starclouds to Kadwon. It was the biggest spaceship Jeremy

had ever seen.

The name *Ponce De Leon* was emblazoned across the prow in ten-foot-high letters, as if it could have some cabalistic influence upon the outcome of the ship's quest. Jeremy smiled grimly. Didn't the owner of the *Ponce De Leon* know his history? Old Ponce the Spaniard had died seeking his fountain of youth in Florida in the sixteenth century.

For the *Ponce De Leon*, being refitted here on Kadwon — owner-master Tobias Gregg — was seeking the grail of twenty-second century galactic civilization, a fabled fountain of youth rumored to be somewhere in the vast starclouds beyond Kadwon, fifty thousand light years from Earth and as far from most other centers of galactic civilization.

Jeremy climbed the gangway as the tubers and fitters and jump-suited portcrew scurried all about the great ship, preparing her for blastoff. Jeremy had heard about the *Ponce De Leon*. Tobias Gregg, an ageing millionaire from earth, had brought her across deep space with a crew of Earthmen. Tobias Gregg was dying, should by all means have died by now, of old age. But he was hanging on, grimly warding off the final dissolution, in his quest for the Fountain. His expedition, with the huge *Ponce De Leon* as its fruits, was

probably the most elaborate in Kadwon's history as Gateway World.

A bald giant of a man met Jeremy at the gangway's head. He must have been close to seven feet tall and must have weighed near three hundred pounds. He had a hard arrogant face under his completely bald pate. He wore the Van Dyke beard often affected by Earthmen on the startrails, since Earthmen seemed alone gifted with facial hair.

"Earthboy, ain't you?" he boomed at Jeremy.

"Yes. I'd like to see Mr. Gregg."

"Nobody does. Sees him, I mean," shouted the giant above the noise and shouting of the portcrew. "The Old Man lies in what they call an umblic all day. Gets his nutrients without wasting a single calorie of energy. Wants to make sure he's still alive if we find the fountain. What is it you want?"

"I need a job," Jeremy said. "I need it bad. If I don't get it —"

"Don't bother telling me the whole sad story, son. Don't know how you was missed. We're short men and the Old Man will hire nothing but Earthmen for the final dash across deep space to the Fountain. You're probably the only Earthman on Kadwon not working for us. Come on aboard, boy."

"I was hoping that would be your answer," Jeremy said. "You see, my uncle was killed in a brawl with one of your men, and I thought —"

"Now wait a minute," the giant told Jeremy, suddenly barring the way. "Did you say your uncle? Name wouldn't be Armitage, would it?"

"Armitage, yes."

The giant jerked a thumb in a down-gangway direction. "Shouldn't of told me, kid. Now my hands are tied."

"But why? What did my uncle do? All I know is he was in a fight with one of your crew. All I know —"

"One of the crew, you say? With Tobias Greggs III, you mean. Grandson of the umblicman looking for eternal youth. Not that Tobias III couldn't use it, either. His grandfather's probably over a hundred. Anyhow, it was a brawl and maybe Tobias III was wrong and maybe your uncle was. Ain't saying. But I guess it don't matter. Crewman put the knife to your uncle, direction of Tobias III. That's Tobias for you. Checked into it right off, too. Heard about you and thought you might come here. No work, is what he said."

"But why tell me all this?"

The giant shrugged. "I work for Tobias Greggs and his grandson. But I don't have to like them. Do

I?"

"No-o."

"Listen, son. I'd like to help you. But an Earthman this far from home can't afford to take chances. Know what I mean?"

"I'm in debt. A thousand credits. I —"

"Know all about that, too. Undertaker. Vegan, I think. Por Konst's his name?"

"But how did you —"

"Easy. Tobias III hired him. I think Tobias III paid the bill in advance, but you'd never be able to prove it. When Tobias gets mad at someone, even if it's only a kind of bar-room brawl, he's mad."

"Then I don't really owe Por Konst anything?"

"But you can't prove it. I'm sorry, son. I wish I could do something for you, but I ain't got the fare home and I got my own neck to think about. You understand?"

"I guess so," Jeremy said.

"Fountain of youth!" the giant said, bitterly. "That's what brought me out here. Not that I need it for myself. Look at me. An elixir of life, though, would be worth ten times its weight in pure gold. Kid like you ever stop to think of that? Ten times its weight, I tell you. I came out here looking, and kind of drifted. That was a long time ago but would you believe it,

this is the only time I ever had a chance at the Fountain. This expedition of Tobias, grandfather and grandson. So you see —”

“Mr. Cowper!” someone called from down below, within the bowels of the huge spaceship. “On the double, Mr. Cowper!”

“Tobias III calling,” Cowper told Jeremy. “Got to be going now, son. Tell you what. Maybe when I come back I’ll look up this Vegan undertaker and . . .”

“Sure,” Jeremy said. “Sure, that’s all right.”

“Sorry I can’t help you now,” Cowper growled, and disappeared inside the ship. A moment later he stuck his head out again. “I meant that about looking the Vegan up,” he said lamely, and disappeared again.

Jeremy went down the gangway.

CHAPTER III

KADWON CITY, naturally, was crowded. Of necessity, it was a polyglot city. A hundred races, a hundred native tongues. A babble of confusion in a city which defied every architectural law in its crowded jumble of multi-world buildings built on steep, rocky hills under the tropical glare of the three Kadwonian suns. The native jet-hided Kadwonians were decidedly in the minority. As you walked along, you saw very few of

the Kadwonians. There were Sirians, Arcturans, Capellans, Regans, people of almost all the inhabited worlds, come to seek eternal life or the riches and power which the control of eternal life could give them, on Kadwon.

Because rumor said that a Fountain of Youth—a Fountain of Forever, the Kadwonians called it — bubbled its coveted elixir on a starcloud world near Kadwon, an uncharted world within the great swarming starcloud of Ophiuchus. Rumor, Jeremy thought. Some people insisted that the rumor of the Fountain was one foisted on a gullible galaxy by the Kadwonians themselves, bringing a false prosperity to Kadwon in the throngs of youth seekers. These were the wise people, the ones who never came. The others — those who dared believe —had come.

Most of them — and it seemed Jeremy would join their numbers — had died on Kadwon, growing old with swift, ironic speed in the withering tropic heat of the planet while they sought a treasure which could restore their lost youth and keep them alive forever.

Almost the full day of grace had passed. Jeremy could now either return to Por Konst of his own free will or try to hide out until the Vegan Undertaker had written off his so-called loss. Hid-

ing, though, was out of the question on Kadwon; for two reasons. In the first place, life outside the refrigerated city was impossible for an Earthman. And in the second, Kadwon's police would kill a fugitive on sight. Now that he had failed to get a job, Jeremy knew that he had only one choice. He must return to Por Konst and, for the time being at least, work for him

For an undertaker, Jeremy thought. There was something ironic about that. Undertaking was a common profession on Kadwon, because the mortality rate was so high — among seekers after eternal youth

And Jeremy knew about men like Por Konst. He wouldn't be an employee of the fat Vegan. He would be a slave.

"Earthman?" a timid voice piped at Jeremy's shoulder.

He whirled but could distinguish no one in particular in the crowds that surged along Kadwon City's main street, flowing by the undertaking parlors that served those who sought the Fountain and had failed and the medical establishments prolonging the lives of those still seeking and the world-promising storefronts and electric signs of the quacks who claimed they could achieve what the medical men could not. Shrugging, Jeremy kept walking.

"You're an Earthman, yes?" came the piping voice again.

The words were spoken in the koine of interstellar parlance, an ungrammatical mixture of English, Sirian B, and Denebian Rawaz. And they came, Jeremy saw now, from the lips of a Kadwonian native, a small jet-skinned fellow whose thin round shoulders were bare in the hot three-sun heat and whose head, the color and texture of a dried prune, barely reached Jeremy's own shoulders.

"I'm an Earthman," Jeremy admitted. "What do you want?"

"Seek work maybe, Earthman? Earthman need job?"

"Yes I do," Jeremy said eagerly. "I want a job. Who are you?"

"Messenger only. You come, yes?"

"Hell," said Jeremy, "yes!" and the palsied fingers of a shriveled hand clutched at his sleeve.

JEREMY found himself led through the crowds and out of Kadwon City's commercial section into a region of run-down boarding houses which catered for the most part to a collection of interstellar octogenarians who had barely enough money left to pay for sub-standard room and board while they still clung, moribund, to the hope that they might one day find the Fountain. At first Jeremy thought they would stop at one

of the run-down dwellings, but the withered old Kadwonian did not stop. The old man panted with every step he took, the breath rasping in his scrawny throat and being pumped by his lungs with much difficulty. He was not sweating, though. Kadwonians rarely sweated in the fierce heat of their native planet.

But Jeremy was completely drenched by the time they reached their destination. It was a spacefield — or, what passed as a spacefield, Jeremy thought wryly.

And he had heard of it. They called it The Last Ditch, and it was that for the thousands of elixer pilgrims who blasted off from its scarred, warped, pitted, broken surface every year in spaceships held together by spit and string. For, those of the semi-derelicts who inhabited Kadwon City's most squalid section and who could still scrape together a few credits for an ancient tub of a spaceship, took their fading hopes and fading third-hand spacetubs to Last Ditch and there put them in a semblance of functioning order and blasted off for the Fountain.

Many of them, Jeremy knew, were never heard of again. Others somehow managed to crawl back to Last Ditch, broke, bitter and disillusioned, to die.

Jeremy looked out across the uneven expanse of Last Ditch. He

counted a dozen spaceships, bruised and beaten tubs, in his immediate vicinity. He did not consider any of them to be spaceworthy.

He looked at the Kadwonian and said, "Someone wants a crew, is that it? Someone who can't pilot a ship?"

The Kadwonian nodded. "Specify: Earthman. You Earthman, specified. You come."

But Jeremy hesitated. It was hard to tell which would be worse: one man crew in a spaceship that would probably never return, or quasi-legal slave to the Vegan, Por Konst.

"You Earthman, specified. You come," repeated the Kadwonian hopefully.

"Which ship?" asked Jeremy warily.

The Kadwonian pointed. Jeremy sighed. It seemed the most beaten up of all the spacecraft in Last Ditch. It seemed a positive catastrophe of a spaceship, doomed to make a final feeble run across deep space to the mythical Fountain — if it got off Kadwonian soil at all. And, if it did, the final blastoff was bound to finish it. There would be no return in the — the *Star of Magellan*, Jeremy decided, reading the name newly stenciled on the battered ship, the bright name which somehow tried to defy the evidence of twisted tail tubes and an accordion-rumpled

atmosphere fin and a foreshortened prow whose observation deck had, at some previous date, been amputated.

"You come?" the Kadwonian demanded.

Jeremy shook his head. With Por Konst at least there was a chance he might escape his bondage. The *Star of Magellan*, though, was certain death. On any other world than Kadwon, it would have been grounded and scrapped. "I don't think so," Jeremy said, and began to walk away.

"Wait!" cried the Kadwonian. "Specify: Earthman. You Earthman, specified. You come."

And when Jeremy faced him again, the old Kadwonian was pointing a blaster at him, holding it in a trembling hand.

But at this close range the palsy hardly mattered.

"Earthman specified. You come now?" asked the old man.

Without answering, Jeremy walked before him to the all but defunct *Star of Magellan*.

The crumbled, scarred disc of the outer airlock door opened before they had quite reached it.

CHAPTER IV

A GIRL stood silhouetted against the comparative darkness of the spaceship's interior. At first Jeremy thought that she was hardly

more than an adolescent, but as he came closer he saw that she was about his own age. He gaped, and not merely because she was pretty. He gaped because a panda or some other rare Earth animal would have been about as expected in such a place.

"They shanghai you too?" Jeremy asked.

"Specify: Earthman," the little old Kadwonian said for the tenth time. "Earthman, here. You pay?" he asked in his piping voice, and held his hand out to the girl. She placed something in the hand; the hand closed. Then the little old man remained outside the ship while the girl led Jeremy within the airlock.

"I asked, did they shanghai you too?" Jeremy said again as the airlock door slammed shut behind them. The girl turned and spun the lock wheel and the unseen metal teeth meshed. A knowledge of the combination would now be necessary to open the airlock door Jeremy knew.

The girl said, "Do I look as if I'm here against my will?"

"I just didn't think a girl as young as you —"

"I'm nineteen."

"—would go off looking for the Fountain of Forever, that's all."

The girl smiled. It was a little pixie smile in a small heart-shaped face framed by thick, lustrous,

softly curling black hair. It was an impish smile, and with it went the words, "How do you know I haven't already been there -- and back?"

"Where? You mean the Fountain?"

"But of course. Maybe I'm old enough to be your grandmother."

"I don't believe that," Jeremy said.

"Well, you shouldn't -- because it isn't true. But why don't you believe it? Is it because you don't believe in the Fountain?"

"The Fountain isn't a religion. It isn't something you believe in. Either it's there, somewhere -- or it isn't. Belief or disbelief, they don't matter."

"How would you like to find it?"

Now Jeremy smiled. "My likes or dislikes hardly matter, the way I figure it. Your henchman outside brought me here against my will, and --"

"For a chance to share in the greatest potential treasure in the history of the galactic system; that's against your will?"

"Anyway, against my will."

"The captain of this ship wanted an Earthman. The Kadwon found an Earthman. With the way Tobias Greggs is snapping up Earthmen for his big expedition, it's amazing you were still in cir-

culatation."

"It was no accident," Jeremy said, and sketched in the story of his uncle and Tobias Greggs III, both from his own knowledge and from what the giant Cowper had told him. "Which explains," Jeremy finished, "why your Kadwonian hatchetman was able to find me."

The girl laughed. "Some hatchetman," she said.

"You said the captain. I take it you're not alone here?"

Before the girl could answer, a compartmental door opened to Jeremy's left, revealing a companionway leading from midquarters, where Jeremy and the girl stood talking, to the control room.

A WOMAN all dressed in black leatheroid came vaulting through the round doorway. Vaulting -- that was the only word to describe the way she moved. She advanced almost as if she carried, and used, an invisible pogo stick. She moved jerkily but swiftly, the black leatheroid of her garments creaking. She had an ancient hag face with high cheekbones and the skin drawn over them parchmentlike and the eyes set, it seemed, almost half inside her skull. She must have been close to ninety years old, Jeremy thought.

"Captain Eunice," the girl said,

"this is the Earthman."

"What's his name, what's his name?" demanded Captain Eunice in a strident voice.

"It's Jeremy Armitage," Jeremy said.

"A boy," Captain Eunice snapped. "A boy, hardly fit for man's work. Can you pilot a spaceship, boy?"

Jeremy nodded as the old woman approached him and proceeded to circle about him several times on her leatheroid-stockinged, broom-stick-thin legs. "Well, you're no shrimp, anyway," she admitted grudgingly.

"This wasn't my idea," Jeremy said with some indignation. "If you don't like what you see, open that airlock door and —"

"At least he has spirit," Captain Eunice croaked. "At least he has spirit. But then, I've never seen an Earthman on the star-trails without spirit, and that's a fact, in seventy years of star-trailing, I haven't. Say something nice, young man. Say I don't look that old. Aren't Earthmen the galaxy's greatest flatterers, too? Well, aren't they, Jo?"

The girl, whose name was Jo, said that they were. She added, more to the point, "Jeremy, we'd like you to look at the controls. We think the ship is in shape for blastoff, but we're no experts. You see, the old Kadwonian is some-

thing of a mechanic and he's been working on the controls for close to a week now. But since you're the one who'll take the *Star of Magellan* into space for us, you ought to check the controls yourself."

"A three-way split," Captain Eunice croaked suddenly. "Fair, isn't it? Of course, lad, one look at me will give you the real reason I want to find the Fountain. The cold dead hand of dissolution has been caressing me for as many years as you've been alive, you can be sure. I want to be young again! I don't want to die! I want to be as young and desirable and beautiful —" here she advanced to a position within arm's length of Jo and actually pinched the firm flesh of the girl's arm — "as Greatgranddaughter here. Don't I, Greatgranddaughter?"

"Yes, Captain Eunice," Jo said obediently.

"I outlived her grandmother," Captain Eunice boasted to Jeremy. "And her poor mother died in a spacewreck. Jo's my ward, you see. You see, young man?"

"I see," said Jeremy, wondering if this wasn't the weirdest captain of the weirdest ship ever to seek the Fountain.

"But do you? do you? I'll admit it, young man, I haven't grown old gracefully. Why shouldn't I admit it? I want that fountain. I want to be young again. Look at Jo —

well, look at her. I want Jo's smiling young face. Open your mouth, Greatgranddaughter." Jo opened her mouth obediently. "I want those smiling white teeth. I want those firm breasts and the limbs with the taut skin. You understand, you understand?"

"He understands, Captain Eunice," Jo said. "Please get some rest now. You need your rest."

"Need my rest, need my rest. Don't tell me what to do!" Captain Eunice cried, pacing back and forth quite spryly. "I can feel it, I tell you — the chill breath of dissolution breathing down my neck. Don't you see, child? Don't you see? We've got to hurry."

"Listen," Jeremy said. "I don't want to disillusion you. But —"

"You're going to lecture us on the Fountain as rumor?" Captain Eunice demanded. "Don't tell me you are?"

"Well —" Jeremy began.

"You think we are like those who come out here with no plan? You think we intend to blast off into deep space and start searching every square light year from here to the end of the Ophiuchian star-clouds? A person, a young person, mind you, could spend the rest of his life doing that without success."

"I know," Jeremy said. "That's why I —"

"We have a chart, you young

fool," Captain Eunice croaked. "A chart! It's a good chart, It's no phoney. It will get us there, to the Fountain. You think I'm fooling?"

"Not fooling, but —"

"But we *have been fooled*, is that what you're thinking?"

Jo said, "Captain Eunice. Your rest."

"Let me finish, Greatgranddaughter. The Kadwonian, Jeremy. The little old man who brought you. Would he particularly want to find the Fountain?"

"Well, there's money in it for anyone. Even for a Kadwonian."

"He's a very old man. He won't live much longer. He's almost as old as I am. Well, isn't he?"

"I guess so," Jeremy admitted.

"And he has no family. Naturally, as a Kadwonian, as a firm believer in reincarnation, he has no need to use the elixir on himself. Well, to make a long story short, there was a traffic accident in town, and Pha Ioult's life was saved by Greatgranddaughter. Somehow, Pha Ioult — that's the old Kadwonian, of course — had come upon a chart which leads to the Fountain. He had no need of it. He gave it to Jo. You see? Now do you?"

BEFORE Jeremy could answer, Jo took Captain Eunice firmly by the arm and led her back toward the round door. "Now you're

going to get your sleep," she said. "No more fooling. Off with you, now."

"But I —"

"But nothing. You want to live to find the Fountain, don't you?"

"And if I do I'll be young as you and stronger and everything?" Captain Eunice said with the abrupt and unexpected childishness of senility.

"Yes, Captain Eunice," Jo said and the old woman shuffled through the companionway toward her sleeping quarters.

"I know what you're thinking, Jeremy. That she's a foolish old lady," Jo told him. "Well, maybe she is. But I'd have grown up in an orphanage if she hadn't cared for me. I know she — she's almost senile now, sometimes. But the Fountain is her great dream. The Fountain can make her young again — or — well, at least she can die happy looking for it if we never find the Fountain. Now do you understand?"

"Which do you think it will be?" Jeremy wanted to know.

"Well, Pha Ioult has no reason to lie. He believes in this chart he gave us. He —"

"May I see the chart?"

"But we destroyed it. With Pha Ioult's help, Greatgrandmother and I committed the chart to memory, then destroyed it. This way, it can't be stolen. But enough of Pha

Ioult. Captain Eunice wants to blast off in the morning, Jeremy. Since you're going to pilot the *Star of Magellan*, you better go forward and familiarize yourself with the controls. I'll make us supper in the galley, then I think we ought to get some sleep. All right?"

"All right," Jeremy said after a while. At first he had bristled at her words: he was about to make a snide remark about being a prisoner whose likes or dislikes hardly amounted to much under the circumstances. But he did not. There seemed to be something almost contagious about Jo's earnest attitude and her almost pious regard for her doddering great grandmother. Jo was in dead earnest, and — Jeremy decided — altruistically at that. For she'd hardly mentioned the possibility of untold wealth for all of them, should they find the Fountain which had lured men from all over the galactic system to Kadwon and the Ophiuchus starclouds for two generations. She seemed to feel responsible to Captain Eunice as well as indebted to her. And somehow, Jeremy did not want to destroy the emotions she felt.

"I'll go forward," he said, and did so.

THE CONTROL room of the *Star of Magellan* was a plea-

sant surprise. All the fittings seemed spanking new. The glass-work gleamed. The metal reflected light too, shining almost mirror-bright. This impressed Jeremy very favorably. With the help of the Kadwonian, Pha Ioult, Jo had managed to convert a spaceship which looked ready for the scrap-heap into what was in all probability a spaceworthy vessel.

Jeremy confirmed this by going over the controls minutely. What he found did not amaze him now: everything was in order. The dials alone were new, however — the *Star of Magellan's* instruments had seen trillions of miles of service. But they had been greased and repaired with almost loving care. Jeremy could only conclude after a thorough two hour examination that Jo and Pha Ioult had done the best they could with the material at hand and that the *Star of Magellan* ought to be able to take them to whatever space co-ordinates were indicated on Pha Ioult's memorized — and destroyed — chart.

Then Jo came into the control room with a tray containing supper for herself and for Jeremy. They ate and made small talk and the food — a dehydrated Sirian fowl and all the trimmings — was quite satisfactory. They were halfway through dessert and smiling frequently at each other when a

buzzer flashed over Jeremy's head.

"Radio signal," Jo said. "I wonder who wants us?" She got up and went to the radio controls. "*Star of Magellan*," she said. "Josephine Stedman on the *Star of Magellan*. Go ahead, please."

"Captain Rohak of the Kadwonian police," a voice identified itself in the interstellar koine. "Are you acquainted with a Kadwonian named Pha Ioult?"

"Why, yes. Yes, we are," Jo said. "What is it?"

"Pha Ioult has been hurt," the radio voice said metallically, with a complete lack of emotion. "He keeps calling for you, and for a Captain Eunice, Miss Stedman. Can either or both of you come to Central Police Headquarters?"

"Is he badly hurt?" Jo asked.

"He is not expected to live much longer, Miss Stedman."

"I'll come at once," Jo said, a catch in her voice. Then she cut the connection and asked Jeremy, "You'll stay here with Greatgrandmother?"

"What for? Greatgrandmother will be all right inside a sealed spaceship. I'm going with you."

Jo hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "I'll just leave a radio-note for Captain Eunice," she said, and did so. Then they went outside together.

TWO OF KADWON'S three suns had set. That was as close to nightfall as the Gateway World ever came, since the third sun, the sun remaining in the sky, was the smallest and weakest of the three, a watery red orb which gave as much light as a trio of full moons on Earth would give. It was an eerie sort of light, too — suffusing everything, the rocky Kadwonian landscape, the battered old ships in Last Ditch and the run-down buildings on the edge of Kadwon city, with a dim red light and casting long black shadows across the rock-strewn spacefield.

"I trust you now," Jo said abruptly. "You can try to get away if you wish. But I don't think you will. You're coming with us wherever the chart leads—aren't you?"

"I think I am," Jeremy said. "Yes."

"Mind telling me why?"

"Yes, I do mind. Under the circumstances. Let's give it some time to incubate."

"How old are you, Jeremy?" Jo asked as they went looking for a copter cab. "Nineteen — twenty?"

"Nineteen."

"My age. But you act older —"

"You act older too, Jo — as if —"

"As if I've had a kind of, well, unsheltered life? I have. I . . . listen, Jeremy. I like — like you. I don't want you to be disillusion-

ed. I'll have to admit something."

"About what?"

"About Captain Eunice. She's a hard calculating, ruthless woman, as you may have gathered."

"I thought it could have been the effects of senility."

"Not Captain Eunice. No, sir. She's always been that way. I wanted you to know that, so — if you don't want to help her any longer . . ."

"But I'm not helping her. I'm helping you."

They were walking side by side in the dim red light. Jeremy turned. She was very close. Her face seemed to grow in the red light, seemed to swell up before him. She was very beautiful. All at once he could see nothing but the lovely red lips, moist and slightly parted over the small white teeth now. He brought his lips down toward hers —

"There's a copter cab!" Jo cried, pointing and beginning to run. Jeremy ran after her and together they hailed the cab. Moments later they were sitting together on the cushions as Jo told the pilot, a boiled lobster pink skinned Regan, "Central Police Headquarters, please."

Then she told Jeremy, "I haven't let myself think of Pha Ioult until now. I didn't want to — as if, somehow, I could preserve the memory of him still alive, un-

hurt—"

"He was alive when they called."

"But on his death bed. They all but said so. Poor Pha Ioult."

"He was an old man."

"But only this afternoon he seemed so, so Jeremy, if he was hurt because of what he did for Captain Eunice, I'll never forgive myself."

"That's just plain silly. You already saved his life once, didn't you?"

"Yes, but —"

"Besides, why don't we wait until we see what the story is — at police headquarters?"

Less than ten minutes later, the copter swooped down over the heart of Kadwon City. They landed on the roof port of Central Police Headquarters and Jo paid the man with coins from her pocket.

THEY HAD a small first-aid station and a single-room emergency hospital inside the police station. Pha Ioult was breathing his last in the single room of the hospital. They found him ringed by two police doctors and a half dozen uniformed officers. He was trying to mutter something. Jeremy caught a glimpse of his seamed black face, a strange gray-blue color now with approaching death only minutes away.

"I'm Josephine Stedman," Jo whispered to one of the policemen. "They told us to come down here. They —"

"Miss Stedman, of course. Come in please."

"Do the doctors think —"

"That he can survive? Hardly, miss. Not at his advanced age. He's a Kadwonian, though. He won't die unhappy. Kadwonians do not. But he's been calling for you. We've drugged him because he's been hanging on in great pain, refusing to die, almost, until he could talk to you." With Jo and Jeremy behind him, the police officer led them to the bed.

Pha Ioult's ancient gray-blue face was filmed over with sweat. The eyes, white and glassy, opened wider as Jo approached. "Miss Stedman?" the barely audible whisper of a voice said. "That you, Miss Stedman?" it said again in the koine.

"It's all right, Pha Ioult. It's all right," Jo said.

"No Miss. Is not all right. This specify Earthman with you? Specify Earthman here?"

"Yes," Jo said.

"Specify: Earthman. Pha Ioult bring Earthman," Pha Ioult said deliciously.

One of the doctors plunged a hypodermic needle into the dying man's arm and the gray-blue face registered nothing as the needle

pierced the skin and the pain-killing drug was administered. Then Pha Ioult said, "Earthman, you listen."

"I'm listening," Jeremy said.

"Other Kadwonian point out Pha Ioult. I boast. All the time. Kadwonian know of Fountain, no care. Metempsychosis, no need of fountain. You understand?"

"Yes," Jeremy said.

"Protect them, Earthman specified. They need you."

"From what, Pha Ioult? Protect them from what?"

"Other Kadwonian say, 'this he, this much big talker.' Earthmen take me, say 'talker, now you talk'. I say nothing, first. They hurt. I still say nothing."

"Tobias Greggs," Jeremy whispered. "Greggs' men?"

"No name. Big Earth expedition for Fountain. Much men and great ship."

"Greggs," Jeremy told Jo bleakly.

"They hurt Pha Ioult, Pha Ioult final talk. But no give them chart info, not Pha Ioult, even if they kill. No give them."

"He's very weak now," one of the doctors said in koine. "He's quite delirious. I can't guarantee he even knows what he's saying."

"What did you tell them, Pha Ioult?" Jeremy asked. "Can you tell us that?"

"*Star of Magellan*, I tell. Sted-

man girl and mother-mother-mother. I tell." The glassy eyes rolled. The voice, louder now, distinct for the first time, said, "Earthman, specified. Pha Ioult find Earthman. Good?"

"Very good, Pha Ioult," Jo said. There were tears in her eyes.

"Then die happy and wait for reincarnation," said Pha Ioult. "You help, Earthman specify?"

"I'll help," Jeremy vowed.

THERE WAS a noise in Pha Ioult's throat. His eyes rolled again, and now only the whites showed. One of the doctors leaned close over the old face and pulled at the lower lid of one eye. "He's dead," the doctor said.

They all filed out of the room, one of the police officers escorting Jeremy and Jo toward a small room. "We'd appreciate a statement," the officer said, unexpectedly in excellent English.

Nodding, Jo told him what she knew of Pha Ioult. A secretary had entered the room to take down her statement, and then departed. "That poor old man," Jo said when she had finished.

"Don't say that, miss. He died happy. You saw that yourself."

"But they must have hurt him so," Jo sobbed. "I almost hate to consider myself an Earthwoman when something like that happens."

"The bad part of it is," the po-

lice officer said. "we can't prove anything. The delirious last words of a dying octogenarian would hardly stand up in court, even if we had a case to bring to court. But they killed Pha Ioult. We know and can't prove that. They killed him for information — about you, miss. We could piece that much together."

"Are they still on Kadwon?" Jo asked.

"Yes, miss. After what Pha Ioult said, we've dispatched a guard to your ship. If they killed once, they're desperate. Naturally, they didn't mean to kill Pha Ioult, but they did use violence on him intentionally. Our guard will remain near your ship until you blast off. I assume you are blasting off for the Fountain?"

"Yes," Jo said.

"Pha Ioult babbled something about you and your mother-mother-mother — that would be great-grandmother — committing a chart of the Fountain's location to memory. If he babbled it here, he might have babbled it to the Greggs expedition. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Jo.

"Then the expedition ship might follow you and — listen, miss. Can't you postpone your search? We have no jurisdiction beyond our planetary boundary."

"Postpone the search? You

don't know my greatgrandmother. It's out of the question."

"Then at least let me send you under escort back to your ship."

"Agreed," Jeremy said before Jo could answer. "We'd be grateful for that, officer."

The policeman smiled. "Under the circumstances, I wish we could clamp an injunction on your departure. Unfortunately, we cannot. Tragic, isn't it?" he mused all at once. "I mean, how the search for an elixir of life and eternal youth leads so often to death? There must be a moral in it somewhere. Well —" as Jo Stedman and Jeremy got up — "good luck, young people. Good luck."

CHAPTER V

A MAN in the royal purple uniform and light weight cape of the Kadwonian police force was waiting for them at the roof level of the building lift. "Officer Pluchak, Miss Stedman," he said as the pneumatic lift deposited Jo and Jeremy at roof level. "I'm to fly you wherever you wish."

Jo asked, "You know the way to Last Ditch, of course?"

Officer Pluchak nodded as they climbed aboard his small police copter. It was barely large enough for the three of them, with Jeremy and Jo squeezed together in back, behind the pilot seat. In

seconds, the jet rotor was whining. And, seconds after that, they rose into the still brilliant light of the Kadwonian equivalent of night.

"Night," Jeremy said. "But you could read by the light of their moon."

"It's no moon," Jo corrected him. "One of the three Kadwonian suns."

"I keep forgetting. I —" All at once he stopped talking. There were tears in Jo's eyes. "Hey, take it easy. Come on now."

"I can't help thinking of Pha Ioult. There was no reason for him to die — hurt like that. They hurt him because of us. Because a — a selfish old woman like Captain Eunice and other people like her, either selfish because they haven't had enough of life and will do anything to get the secret of eternal youth for themselves, or selfish because they want to own that secret and sell it at fantastic prices — because people like that come halfway across the galaxy to find the Fountain."

"They could hurt Pha Ioult's body, but they couldn't touch him where it really counts. They couldn't shake his belief. Pha Ioult died happy. All Kadwonians —"

"That's not the point! Oh, I'm sorry, Jeremy. Lord knows I didn't mean to snap at you." Her hand found his in the dim light

inside the copter's enclosed cockpit. "Forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," Jeremy said. It was much lighter outside than within the copter, which made visibility excellent. You could see the streets of Kadwon City stretching out below and behind the copter like the spokes of an enormous wheel radiating from the hub of Kadwon City's first class spacefield, a gleaming alabaster expanse with administration buildings in a small cluster at one end and the blasting pits, hardly less white than the aprons surrounding them, taking up most of the circular field.

The Kadwonian spacefield. Not Last Ditch. . . .

"Hey, wait a minute!" Jeremy cried, grasping the pilot's shoulder in front of him. "This isn't the way to Last Ditch."

The pilot shook his hand off and did not answer. Jeremy looked at Jo, but she shook her head. She didn't know what was going on, either. Jeremy tried again, "We wanted to go to Last Ditch. Maybe you misunderstood us!"

No answer. Jeremy looked outside again. The copter was going down now, swinging low over the spacefield, sweeping over the administration building and out toward the blasting pits. The police

pilot's back was stiff and straight in front of Jeremy.

"I'm asking you," Jeremy said, "and I want an answer. Where are you taking us?"

Jo said, alarm in her voice, "Jeremy, look down there! Isn't that Greggs' expedition ship?"

Jeremy looked where she had indicated. The enormous bulk of the Greggs expedition ship was unmistakable.

The copter drifted down toward it.

"Pull out of it," Jeremy ordered the police pilot. "You have no business taking us there."

When the man still did not answer, Jeremy grabbed his shoulder and tried to force him from the pilot chair. They struggled for a moment, the pilot falling out of the pilot chair sideways. Jeremy hunched forward to take his place but heard Jo scream suddenly. Something — it was the pilot's arm, and the hand held something dark and solid-looking — blurred toward him. Jeremy tried to avert his head, but pain exploded violently there, engulfing him. He was aware of falling forward, of clawing at the openwork back of the pilot chair, of scraping his jaw against it, then of light and awareness disappearing simultaneously as if a curtain had been drawn.

WHEN HE came to, he knew instinctively that not many minutes had passed although he was no longer in the copter.

At first he heard a babble of voices and the voices were speaking koine and Jeremy could not understand them even though he knew koine. Then slowly his mind cleared and the babble became words. Jeremy became aware of something hard cradling his body, and a cautious parting of his eyelids revealed the dazzling white surface of the spacefield blasting apron. It gave him a view of legs, too, of a girl's legs — that would be Jo — and of a man's. That would be the policeman. Phoney policeman? thought Jeremy. Not necessarily. It was more likely that he had simply and expediently been bribed. The Tobias Greggs expedition was, Jeremy knew, the most ambitious one ever to be fitted out for the dash to the Fountain of Forever. It had not stopped at the murder of Pha Ioult — or, Jeremy thought grimly, the cold-blooded killing of his own uncle — and would certainly not stop at police bribery.

The voices were the policeman's and Jo's. Jo was saying:

" . . . away with it. Don't you realize that? Unless you turn right around and take us back to the copter and fly us over to Last Ditch —"

"It's a little late for that, don't you think?" the policeman asked her dryly. "Look, miss. I got nothing against you personally, but I got a stake in this. A fistful of money in exchange for you, that's my stake. More credits than I've ever seen at one time. I can't think of a better stake, can you?"

"What are we waiting here for?"

"They saw us come down. They come out and get us. Those were my orders."

"You'll never get away with it, Pluchak. You know that, don't you?"

The policeman laughed harshly to fill the silence which followed. "That's very funny. I wonder how many people who said things like you'll never get away with it lived to see their prediction come true. Well — hey, take a look up there. Airlock's opening."

Jeremy remained where he was, sprawled out on the apron which skirted between two blasting pits. Opening his eyes cautiously, he saw that one of the pits was vacant and although from the air its bottom had been almost the same dazzling white as the apron, from the ground it was almost pitch black. Sitting upon the second pit like a huge incubating hen was the Greggs expedition spaceship, prow straight and high so that Jeremy could not see the foreport cluster

from where he lay. He could, however, see one of the ship's airlocks. It was situated about midway up the sleek metallic side and it was opening now, the ramp telescoping outward and down and soon touching the apron with a barely audible scraping. Three figures, looking tiny as ants, were escalated downramp toward them. Jeremy estimated that the bottom of the ramp met the apron seventy-five yards from them and perhaps a hundred from the copter behind them.

Then things happened almost too fast for Jeremy to follow them in logical sequence. A voice called from the escalating ramp; "Pluchak, that you?" and Pluchak called back, "What's the matter with you? No names, I tell you."

And then, suddenly, Pluchak yelled. Jeremy heard Jo shout, "Get up, Jeremy. Oh, get up, get up!" and then her hands were touching his face. He sprang to his feet at once, startling her. He saw Pluchak clutching his stomach, doubling over. He did not know what Jo had had done to the bribed policeman, but she had done it well. Pluchak straightened with difficulty and Jeremy hit him while he was still trying to claw a blaster from his belt — probably the same blaster he had struck Jeremy with aboard the copter. Pluchak went down, falling heavily and

laying still. Then Jeremy took Jo's hand and they sprinted for the copter.

SECONDS later they were inside and Jeremy swore softly as he groped at the control board. The dazzling white expanse of blasting apron outside had momentarily blinded him. He heard footsteps pounding outside, closer, closer —

"Oh, hurry, Jeremy!" Jo cried.

The rotors whined as their tip-jets caught. The rotors whirled. Then there was the crashing boom of a blaster being fired outside and one whole side of the copter got cherry red, going to slag.

"They'll roast us alive Jeremy," Jo cried, and Jeremy knew it was the truth. He helped Jo outside and accidentally brushed his left hand against the cherry red wall of the copter, blistering the skin. As soon as Jo was clear of the exit in front of him, Jeremy propelled himself out — fists flailing.

There were three of them, and only one had a blaster. Jeremy launched himself at that one and felt his left hand, blistered or not, sink into the man's belly. The man gave a kind of coughing bellow and went down slowly, giving Jeremy time to chop twice at his head with a good left hook.

Jeremy whirled and barely had time to get under a roundhouse

right thrown by one of the other men. Jeremy countered with his left, but it was grabbed in midair — grabbed and yanked to one side. Jeremy lost his footing and was rabbit-punched as he fell.

He climbed to his feet slowly. He was rabbit punched again and fell again, slowly, so that it did not seem to hurt very much when his chin scraped the blasting apron. He got up, groggy and glassy-eyed. Someone else clubbed him from behind. They were very good at it. They were ruthlessly silent. One of them held Jo helpless now, although her legs were kicking air and she was trying to bite his hand as he held it over her mouth to stifle her cries. Another was waiting in front of Jeremy, should he get up again. The third, the one Jeremy thought had been put out of the fight at the outset, had clubbed him from behind.

Jeremy got up a third time. His vision swam. There was something in front of him. Something. It was very important that he elude it. It was a leg and the leg was jack-knifed and it had a knee, and the knee was seeking Jeremy's head as he got up. The knee went crunch and oddly, Jeremy felt nothing. Just a funny kind of numbness. He was floating. Floating through an infinite void which had Kadwon at one end and the unknown, enigmatic world of the Fountain of

Forever at the other. Jeremy fell slowly into the Fountain, its waters gushing and sparkling all about him . . .

DARKNESS ABOVE. Very unlike Kadwon, where the sky was never dark. Darkness above, and light around the edges.

Coming out of unconsciousness, that takes time. Time to orient yourself when there is darkness where there should be no darkness. Time to orient yourself when the first blinding flood of pain blots out everything else for a while.

And voices. The first voice said, "Hurry up, will you? Right here is fine." The first voice was very close to Jeremy's ear. It was panting. It deposited Jeremy on the ground.

"Hurry!" the second voice said, in English like the first voice. "You're kidding aren't you?" The second voice was some distance away, also panting, and coming toward them. "You were carrying the kid but I got this dumb fat cop."

"He still out?"

"Limp as a rag doll. Where, right here?"

"Yes right here."

SOMETHING heavy struck the ground, part of it flopping limply across Jeremy's legs. Jer-

emy wondered if he ought to get up now. He was very weak, but still he might be able to surprise the two voices. He decided to wait. He did not know where they were but gathered that the two men had brought them here for some reason and were going to leave them here.

"Think they'll stay out long enough?"

"When's blastoff?"

There was a pause. Then: "Five minutes, I think. We'd better get out of here."

"We ought to blast them first."

"With what? George took the girl inside the ship with the blaster. It was more important to see she didn't get away. They need her."

"Well, I still think we ought to —"

"You want to strangle them with your bare hands or something? Go ahead, I'm not stopping you. But I'm getting out of here. Less than four minutes now, but go ahead. In four minutes, when the rockets start blasting, they're both going to be radioactive slag anyway. That's not good enough for you?"

"I guess so. O. K. Let's get a move on. It gives me the willies, you know it? I was never down in a blasting pit before. Look at the tubes, will you? Black as the doorway to hell."

"Getting kind of poetic, ain't you. Come on."

"O. K., I'm right behind you."

Footsteps shuffled and the voices were silent. Presently Jeremy heard the two men climbing the rungs which would take them out of the blasting pit. He sat up and took his first good look at the bottom of the blasting pi.

The tubes of the Greggs expedition spaceship loomed dark and enormous overhead. They were the overhead blackness and — in less than three minutes now — they would explode in incandescent, radioactive fury. Turning Jeremy and the bribed policeman named Pluchak to slag. Jeremy supposed they had always intended to do away with Pluchak. He got up. There was light at the periphery of his vision, light all around the edge of the blasting pit, light from the dazzling apron three dozen feet up and all around the circular pit. And there was darkness overhead.

The darkness of fiery radioactive death.

Jeremy leaned down, then kneeled near Pluchak. "Come on," he said, slapping the man's face. "Come on, snap out of it. Out of it now, Pluchak!"

No response. Jeremy slapped the leathery cheeks again, then pinched them. Pluchak moved one arm. Slowly his eyes rolled open.

He looked at Jeremy and his eyes glazed, then focused again, then took on a wild look. He screamed something at Jeremy and struck out weakly with both hands.

"We're not fighting anymore," Jeremy said impatiently. "The fight's over and we both lost. Are you coming now or do I have to drag you out of here?"

Pluchak tried to grab him. Jeremy eluded the weakly groping hands. How much time was left now—two minutes? Well, Jeremy thought, it only took seconds to reach the stairs and climb out of the pit. And he certainly could not leave Pluchak to die, despite the fact that Pluchak had delivered them up to Greggs' men.

"Listen," Jeremy said. "They never meant anything but to get rid of you. Don't you see? You knew too much. They planned to kill you all along!"

"Wha—?" began Pluchak.

"To kill you. They brought both of us down here, to the blasting pit below their ship. We've got less than two minutes! Now are you coming with me?"

Pluchak stood up. His eyes had a vague look and Jeremy did not know if the man believed him or not. Jeremy went toward the ladder at the edge of the blasting pit. He heard Pluchak shuffling behind him.

IT WAS too late when Jeremy turned instinctively. It took a split second only to take in the tableau, and the tableau spelled death. The blasting tubes above them. A minute now. And Pluchak with a rock in his hand, filling his fist. Pluchak swinging, still glassy-eyed, not comprehending.

Jeremy took the rock's full force not on his head but where shoulder and neck joined. The pain thudded through him like a lead weight, and as he fell he saw the man running toward the ladder.

He got to his knees. He was spent now. It was a culmination of the brutal punishment his body had taken. He went down on hands and knees, his arms and legs trembling. He began to pull himself across the rocky floor of the blasting pit, toward its edge, toward the ladder rungs.

Ahead of him, Pluchak fell suddenly. Pluchak screamed and tried to get up. "My leg!" he screamed. "I can feel it. I broke my leg!" He dragged himself along, slowly.

Too slowly . . .

Time seemed miraculously suspended for Jeremy. It was not, of course. But his brain had temporarily lost its ability to associate the passage of events with the continuity of time. He climbed to his feet and staggered toward the edge of the pit. It was not but seemed to

be a great way off. He groped toward it, half blinded with pain, his senses reeling, his legs threatening to buckle under him at every step.

He felt the bottom rung underfoot. An enormous flood of time had passed. Long since the Greggs expedition ship should have blasted off, transforming Jeremy and Pluchak into radioactive slag along with a few thousand tons of Kadwon surface.

Using knees and elbows, Jeremy climbed the rungs. Each one seemed a mountain ledge far above him. Each one was a torment of pain to his exhausted, beaten body. Once he began to fall back and only by sheer effort of will righted himself and kept going. When he reached the top, he hardly realized it. He was still trying to climb. It was as if he had spent his whole life climbing like that, climbing, climbing . . .

He looked back. Pluchak was down there. Pluchak had dragged himself to the bottom rung and had assumed what looked like an attitude of prayer there. Actually, he was only trying to climb them, his arms stretched out above his head, his injured leg dragging him down.

Jeremy turned away. He could do nothing for Pluchak now. He began to crawl away from the blasting pit when he heard a low warning

rumble above and behind him. He crawled faster, scurrying insectlike. He got up and broke into a staggering run. The rumbling was much louder now, and there was a bright glow.

The glow became fiercely incandescent even though his back was to it and the blasting pit absorbed all but a thousandth of the fiery radioactive exhaust. The glow leaped out ahead of him and bounced brightly against the cluster of administration buildings far away. It turned everything brighter than the dazzling Kadwonian day.

In the whining full-throated roar of the rockets, Jeremy thought he heard a distant scream of pain and bubbling death. He kept running. He could not have heard the scream, he told himself. The scream had to be his imagination. But he knew it would haunt him for a long time.

When Jeremy fell forward on his face a quarter of a mile from the Greggs ship's blasting pit, the spaceship was streaking into the sky.

CHAPTER VI

THEY WERE very nice at the hospital, considering he was an alien from halfway across the galaxy, and penniless. They applied a bolt-shaped forcefield to the

slight fracture in his skull, setting it. The forcefield held the setting in place and would hold it that way until the bones knitted. And they dosed him with the new antiradiation drugs which had saved a million lives across the breadth of the galaxy. And they said his bill would be paid by the Spaceman's Welfare Fund. But the hospital's administrative official who came to visit him three days after he had been brought in also said:

"But you know the law, young man. You'll have to leave Kadwon."

"Leave?"

"Because the law says you have to get a job to pay the Welfare Fund back, or be exiled from the planet of your accident. Kadwon, with no jobs available, must insist on the exile."

Under the circumstances, Jeremy could hardly argue. He asked, "Do you know anything about the *Ponce De Leon*?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The ship which blasted off that night?"

"Oh, yes. I remember. We heard of it because at first it was thought you were a member of the crew who had been left behind. The *Ponce De Leon*, master Tobias Greggs out of Earth, I believe, blasted off and was tracked rou-

tinely by radar out of Kadwon's atmosphere. Naturally, that's all we know."

"All! They kidnapped an Earth-girl. There's no telling —"

"The police, young man. That's for the police. Not for me. I am merely a functionary of the hospital who —"

The voice rambled on, but Jeremy wasn't listening. Jo. Jo was up there somewhere, aboard the *Ponce De Leon*. With ancient Tobias Greggs in his umblic, moribund Tobias Greggs, prolonging death so that he might find youth again, desperate Tobias Greggs, who Jeremy had never met but whose plans had crossed Jeremy's first by killing his uncle, then taking Jo into space . . .

"What about the *Star of Magellan*?" Jeremy asked.

"Another ship? I'm afraid I've never heard of it."

"I've got to get out of here."

"That's up to the ward doctor. I'll send him, young man."

The doctor came. Shock, he said. Radioactive poisoning. And the broken skull, now set and held together by forcefield surgery. Not to mention assorted cuts and bruises. Another eight or nine days. Ten days at the outside, young fellow, and you'll be as good as new.

"I've got to get out of here now," Jeremy said. "Right now. I

feel fine. I feel just great."

The doctor looked at him. The doctor smiled. "Yes? Then get up, why don't you?"

Jeremy sat up. It was as if all the blood left his head and his upper body in a rush. He swung his legs over the side of the bed.

The doctor caught him before he fell.

"Time," the doctor said. "That's all you need, time in which to mend. I can guarantee nothing if you don't take at least eight or ten days in rest and recuperation."

The doctor left. The nurse brought gruel and spooned it into Jeremy's mouth. Good. She thought he was weaker than he actually was. He made no move to feed himself, but after the nurse left he practiced sitting up again and by supper time was able to stand. After supper he could even walk a few steps.

By the middle of the night he could walk quite well, although slowly. At supper he had asked for the doctor and then asked the doctor if he might sign a form waiving the hospital of responsibility. The doctor said that since he was a welfare case he could not.

It was past midnight when Jeremy went to the closet and got his clothing and dressed. The doctor was right, he thought as he dressed. He needed rest. But he could-

n't allow himself to.

Something went cold and dead inside him when he thought of Jo with the Greggs expedition. Jo, being forced to tell what she knew of the chart, as the dead Pha Ioult had been forced to talk. Jo, somewhere in space right now, perhaps undergoing torture. . . . And Captain Eunice. He had to find Captain Eunice. He had to reach Last Ditch. If it wasn't too late already.

Because Jo was only a convenience to Captain Eunice. She might wait a few days, but she wouldn't wait indefinitely. She was old and she knew she was old and knew also her ancient heart might stop beating any time. She might decide, then, to embark for the Fountain without her great granddaughter.

Which meant Jeremy would never be able to find Jo, since only Captain Eunice could take him to her.

Outside Jeremy's room, the corridor was empty, windowless, and dark. He walked as rapidly as he could. The effort made his pulses throb violently and brought a wave of vertigo to his injured head. He found a staircase and went down. Once he edged back into the darker shadows when a uniformed hospital orderly came down behind him.

And ten minutes later, he was

on the street.

CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN Eunice's rheumy eyes surveyed him without warmth. "So you left my great-granddaughter with them?" the croaking old voice said. "That girl's going to talk, you know. I just know she is, boy. She lacks the feeling of pride in family"

"Jo's life may be in danger," Jeremy cut her off savagely, "and all you can think of is that she may talk. Did it ever occur to you that the most important thing in the world may *not* be whether you find the Fountain of Forever?"

The clawlike hand streaked out and slapped his face. The skin, fleshless over the hard old bones, felt like sandpaper. "It's the most important thing in the world to me," Captain Eunice said coolly. "And while you're working here, don't forget it."

"Who said I was working here?"

"You came back. Didn't you?"

"Because I want to find Jo before it's too late."

"It's the same thing. Jo's up there, you young fool. She spilled her guts as soon as they laid a hand on her, if I know my great-granddaughter. It's the same thing, Jeremy Armitage, because you need me. You need my space-

ship."

"You need a pilot. You need me."

"What?" cackled the hag. "Don't you think I can find another? Don't you think a hundred old spacehands would come flying at the opportunity?"

"Not Earthmen. Tobias Greggs' got all the Earthmen here."

"A point, boy. But I'll tell you the real reason I wouldn't trade you for a hundred other pilots now. Jo. Jo's the reason. She's up there and you're going up there to find her. Am I right? Well, am I?"

Jeremy shrugged, unwilling to show her his true feelings. He would go after Jo come what may, but the megalomaniac Captain Eunice did not have to know that. "When do we start?" Jeremy asked.

"You're a cool one. What — oh, as soon as we can, of course. As soon as you're ready."

Jeremy walked to the control panel and said, "Let me see Pha Ioult's chart."

"If you know about it you ought to know it exists only in my memory—and Jo's."

Jeremy waited.

At first Captain Eunice said nothing. Jeremy realized she was probing the ninety-year well of her memory. For a moment he was afraid that she might forget. He had read somewhere that the memories of the very old were unreli-

able; they could remember vividly what had happened long ago, in their childhood, but they might have difficulty remembering what happened only yesterday, figuratively speaking. Something about the synapses for memory being used up, Jeremy remembered.

But Captain Eunice said in a low voice, almost a whisper. "The Fountain of Forever, boy! I heard of Pha Ioult's death. Do you know what that means? If that spineless greatgranddaughter of mine hasn't revealed what she knows, only two people alive know the location of the Fountain. Jo — who doesn't need it for herself and lacks the ambition to become the richest person in the galactic system through ownership of it — and I. I, Jeremy, have the stiff swollen bones and the paper sack dug and the transparent skin of advanced old age. I want to be young again. The Fountain will make me young again." Her eyes, deeply sunken in black sockets, almost seemed to disappear entirely. "And once young, Jeremy — ah, once young! Once young I shall be in a position to exploit the Fountain. Riches, power, all I want will be mine. Does this sound melodramatic? I tell you it is not, and I'll show you, before we're finished." She asked abruptly, "Do you believe Josephine to be beautiful?"

Jeremy said, "She's a very pretty girl."

"In my youth, Jeremy. Ah, in my youth I was a true beauty. At that time only the solar system had been opened up to space travel. We still had to discover that the stellar universe itself was peopled everywhere, that life could be supported by varieties of the human form as if, in time immemorial, an ancestor common to us all had planted the seed of humanity across the length and breadth of a galaxy and — who know? — beyond. But in the solar system, Eunice Lovejoy — for my maiden name was Lovejoy — was hailed as a beauty and —"

"THE CHART, Captain Eunice!" Jeremy snapped.

The old woman's eyes were shedding tears of pity for her lost youth now. She looked to Jeremy almost as if she were under the influence of some exotic drug. "The chart," Jeremy said again.

"To be sure, the chart. Some years ago, you see, Pha Ioult was in a spacewreck. The only survivor in a region of totally empty space, he still put his hopes in the Harmon Unit. You are aware of how a Harmon Unit functions?"

"Sure," said Jeremy. "It will automatically be attracted by the nearest world of sufficient size to influence it, whether you can see

the world with the unaided eye or not."

"It was charted as an empty sector of space. Worse than empty, it was the uncharted space of an interstellar dust cloud in Ophiuchus. But unaccountably, Pha Ioult felt his Harmon Unit drawn toward a world he could not see. It was entirely hidden from outside ken, you understand, by the vast dust cloud. Even its luminary — a small sun quite close to the planet itself, its radiated heat kept in by the dust cloud — was hidden from outside ken.

"In his Harmon Unit, Pha Ioult landed on that planet, Jeremy. And found — the Fountain of Forever!"

"How did he know he had found it? And if only Pha Ioult knew about the Fountain until he told you and Jo, how did he get off the Fountain world?"

"He knew because he was told. 'Voices that speak without words' was the way Pha Ioult put it. We'll see about those voices, won't we, Jeremy boy!" Voices, yes — and babies!"

"Babies?" Jeremy repeated the word.

"Babies. The World of the Fountain is teeming with life—infant life. Nothing is grown up, Pha Ioult said. It isn't one Fountain, you see. Every source of water on

the World of the Fountain is a spring of eternal youth. You see, Jeremy. You see what that means? The supply is unlimited. Unlimited. Eternal youth shall be mine — and with it, the galaxy.

"Pha Ioult could speak of the World of the Fountain only with awe. Somehow he regarded it as a sacred place. Perhaps because the unheard voices told him it was the first birthplace of humankind. I do not know, but I tell you this. I don't hold any simple world in awe — not when the world can give me all I want, Jeremy. All I want. Because eventually, if not by us then by others, the World of the Fountain is going to be exploited. The World of the Fountain" She repeated the words, caressing them with her voice.

"Pha Ioult," Jeremy urged her. "The chart?"

"When Pha Ioult surprised them by refusing to drink any of the Fountain World's waters, the voices gave him a spaceship. In it he returned to Kadwon, but before he quite reached his home planet the spaceship was destroyed — as if the voices did not want their handiwork found. And Pha Ioult returned home safely using his Harmon Unit again. *With a chart giving the precise location of the World of the Fountain.*"

"The chart," Jeremy urged a

second time. He sat hunched anxiously over the controls, ready to punch the spatial co-ordinates on the orbit-maker. He watched Captain Eunice shake her head and listened while she recited in a whisper:

"Right ascension oh 3.4 m, declination -.02, .0030 from the galactic equator."

Jeremy punched the co-ordinates eagerly on the orbit-maker and heard the mechanism buzz as it recorded them on its microscopic tapes. While he waited for the orbit to be plotted, Jeremy said, "Except that the right ascension is off three minutes, the World of the Fountain is practically dead center in the heart of the galaxy."

Captain Eunice nodded her head. "Pha Ioult suggested that the World of the Fountain was at one time the exact center of the galaxy. Gravitational influence of other worlds could have made it drift, you understand."

"But if it once was the exact center of the galaxy, and if it also was mankind's birthplace, that almost convinces you that some Divine Plan —"

"I couldn't be less interested in Divine Plans than I am today," Captain Eunice scoffed. "A woman as old as I has need of Divine Plans and must put her hopes on them — but I? Not with the

Fountain of Forever all but in my grasp. Eternal youth, Jeremy — and eternal beauty. For I was beautiful. But you shall see, you shall see!"

JUST THEN the orbit-maker flashed its ready signal in green and white. Jeremy plucked the orbit card from the ready slot and fed it to the automatic pilot after studying it. "No wonder they call Kadwon the Gateway," he said. "The World of the Fountain is less than ten light years from here." He took out a star chart with a superimposed 3-D grid-graph and studied it. "Here it is," he said after a few moments. "A dust cloud ranging from nine to fourteen light years from the Kadwonian system. Angular diameter, 40, albedo almost zero. No wonder they've never explored inside. Who'd expect an interstellar dust cloud with an albedo of close to zero to harbor anything interesting?"

"I don't follow that, Jeremy."

"Usually if there's a star inside, the nebula won't be dark. If it is dark, astronomers assume it's nothing but interstellar gas, dust, and so forth. Apparently the inside of the dust cloud has a tremendously high albedo, reflecting most of the Fountain World's primary's light back on itself. Ah, here we are." As

Jeremy spoke, another light — a red one — flashed this time, indicating that the rocket-firing device had tabulated the *Star of Magellan's* orbit.

"I never could understand," said Captain Eunice, "It all seems so automatic, almost as if you don't need a human astro-gator at all."

"It has to be, up to a point," explained Jeremy. "Because you have to reach very high speeds — by normal space standards — in order to reach the transfer point to sub-space. A human pilot could not remain conscious long enough, couldn't stand the stress. So we ride it out in crash-hammocks and the rockets fire automatically, starting us on our orbit. Once we're in sub-space, though, that's when the human pilot takes over. And I don't have to tell you that a minute error at the beginning of a sub-space orbit can throw you trillions of miles off at your destination."

Jeremy stood up. "All right, Captain Eunice. Might as well strap yourself in, because we're all ready now."

"For a boy, you certainly know a great deal about space travel."

"My uncle," Jeremy said. "Roger Armitage was a fine space pilot until his luck ran out." He smiled at Captain Eunice suddenly.

"Do you want to know why his luck ran out?"

"I couldn't possibly be interested."

"Oh, but you could — and are. His luck ran out because of the Fountain of Forever. It got in his blood like it's in yours. But Roger Armitage wasn't an old man. Roger Armitage wasn't really worrying about restoring his youth yet, because he was in the prime of life. Roger Armitage wanted the wealth and power the Fountain could give him. So the Fountain got in his blood and crowded everything else out and there was only one way he could go — until he was killed here on Kadwon. He went downhill."

Captain Eunice cackled derisively. "We'll see," she said. "We'll see. But you talk just like Pha loul't. Either you're a believer in metempsychosis or you're a first-class pessimist."

Neither was the case, but Jeremy didn't bother to say that. There were certain things, he firmly believed, which mankind should not tamper with. He was not superstitious. He was too young and too obviously of a scientific inclination for that. He did not believe that mankind should permanently bar itself access to the secrets of eternal youth. He simply thought they were not

ready for those secrets now — much as they had not been ready for the secrets of atomic power two centuries before, as proved by the devastating atomic wars of the late nineteen hundreds. The fact suddenly came to him, unbidden, that hundreds of seekers after the Fountain of Forever had never returned to the world of man. It had been assumed that those who had not returned had perished in space accidents — but it was only an assumption.

Perhaps — somehow — they had perished on the World of the Fountain! Or — this was a wild thought, Jeremy told himself — perhaps they were still there. . .

"I'm ready," Captain Eunice called to him in her cackling voice.

With a start, Jeremy turned to her. She was strapped securely into one of the *Star of Magellan's* three control-room crash hammocks. Her mouth was slack, her eyes, deep in their sockets were staring raptly at other worlds, unknown worlds

Jeremy put the controls on the self-timer. He heard the faint purring of the mechanism and knew he had sixty seconds before the *Star of Magellan* blasted off, built up speed and gravities, and reached transfer point for sub-space on an orbit which would take them to the Fountain of Forever. Quickly,

he reclined on another of the crash hammocks, pulling the big leather straps over his shins, his thighs, his waist, his chest, his arms

Then the ten second bell clanged in the stillness of the control cabin and a recorded voice proclaimed the passage of the seconds : . . . nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one

"Eternal youth!" Captain Eunice screamed a split second before Jeremy's world exploded in the brilliance, the roaring and the pain of multiple G blastoff.

CHAPTER VIII

"RIGHT ascension oh 3.4m, declination -.02, .0030 from the galactic equator," Jeremy said. "But I don't see anything. Do you?"

It was purely a rhetorical question, for clearly there was nothing to be seen outside the foreport of the *Star of Magellan* except the vaguely swirling blackness of the dust cloud. The trip thus far, as were most voyages through sub-space, had been completely without incident. But it had consumed a quantity of time agonizing to Jeremy. Seven days.

Seven days with the pall of the dust cloud invisible before them because they were in the gray featureless murk of sub-space. Seven

days with the wild-eyed, eternal-youth-dreaming Captain Eunice for companionship. Seven days thinking of Jo.

Probably, she had come this same way through sub-space. Probably she was there ahead of them now, in Tobias Greggs' *Ponce De Leon*. Had they hurt her? It was sheer agony to think about that, and yet Jeremy's thoughts went in no other direction. He was not sure about Jo's loyalty to her great-grandmother, did not know to what extent it would go but hoped Jo had been sensible enough to surrender the orbit to her captors quickly and painlessly. But then, he told himself for the hundredth time, they might decide they had no further use for her, as they—had decided they had no further use for the bribed policeman, Pluchak. In that case . . . Come off it, Armitage, he had to tell himself a dozen times hourly. They'll still need her. They'll always think they'll still need her because there might be something else, something she held back, something she could still tell them which they would have to know after they reached the Fountain

And now, finally, Jeremy had taken the *Star of Magellan* out of sub-space. He had pin-pointed the co-ordinates perfectly — and

they found nothing but the featureless dust cloud. For hours now they had cruised in ever-widening circles.

Still — nothing

Had they somehow gone wrong? Had Pha Ioult's chart been inaccurate? Perhaps the old woman's memory had been faulty, Jeremy thought in despair. In that case, they would never find Jo — never. Or perhaps the whole story had been Pha Ioult's pipe dream and even now the huge *Ponce De Leon* was circling slowly through the dust cloud too, the Greggs — grandfather and grandson — convinced that Jo had somehow tricked them —

Cut your rockets, please.

"Did you say something?" Jeremy asked Captain Eunice.

"No. I thought you did."

Cut your rockets.

"Rockets. Cut your rockets," Captain Eunice said. "Is that it? Is that what you heard?"

Jeremy nodded. It was not Captain Eunice who had spoken. It was no audible voice. But the words were spoken somehow. Inside his mind. Silently spoken words of command. *Cut your rockets.* A man thinks, Jeremy told himself, in words. In his own language. That is the only way you can think, in the words of your own language. And it is said

that a man, when learning a foreign language, even when living with it constantly, must still do his thinking in his native tongue, for perhaps five years. But the unspoken words, the words he heard with the ears of his mind, the words of thought and not of sound, were in Jeremy's own language, in English, as if whoever had spoken them, silently spoken them, knew his language and thought his language and And Jeremy knew, had known and thought in and silently spoken in Pha Ioult's and how many other languages as well.

"What do you think?" he asked Captain Eunice.

"Hallucination, maybe? Is there any danger if you cut the rockets?"

"None that I know of in deep space."

Captain Eunice shrugged, dry tongue rasping out at dry parched lips. "Then cut them, Jeremy."

WONDERINGLY, Jeremy thumbed over the rocket lever. Instantly and somehow frighteningly, the purring vibration of the rocket motors was gone. In its place the silence was awesome — like the unplumbed void between the galaxies

"Any readings?" Captain Eu-

nice asked Jeremy, indicating the control panel with a jerk of her head.

"None I can see. We haven't changed speed or direction, but the dust cloud will slow us down after a while by friction."

"Shouldn't you hear a noise? A whining?"

"Too tenuous. You'd hear it in atmosphere, if the atmosphere were thick enough."

"I hear something. I hear it, Listen. A whining."

At first Jeremy heard nothing. He was amazed that the crone's ancient ears could hear better than his. Then Jeremy heard it too. A faint whining. The unmistakable sound of atmosphere friction. A distant — and growing — keening. A dangerous shriek of air rushing by the hull of the *Star of Magellan*.

Where no air could be, because there was no world. There was nothing but black space, and a dust cloud.

Alarmed, Jeremy checked the temperature gauges. Sure enough, the exterior hull temperature had risen from a steady three hundred degrees below zero Fahrenheit to two hundred, then one-fifty, then one hundred. And it was still climbing, the hand sweeping the dial with amazing speed.

"There's an atmosphere out there," Jeremy said. "There has to be."

"Where there's an atmosphere — there's a world, you fool! I see nothing. What about your gravitational dials?"

Jeremy had already glanced at them. They showed nothing. If there was a world outside, if they were rapidly approaching it, then it was like no world Jeremy had ever heard of, for it registered zero gravity, and it could not be seen, and apparently it was not pulling the *Star of Magellan* from its path of spacefall.

Do not be alarmed.

"That wasn't you?" Jeremy asked the old woman.

"I didn't say a word."

"Did you hear it too?"

And, before Captain Eunice could answer: *Do not be alarmed. You are about to feel the pressure of sudden deceleration. Do not bother to use your crash hammocks, as they shall avail you nothing. The crash will utterly destroy your spaceship, but what we call a field of occlusion shall protect your persons both from the intolerable G-pressure and the destructive crash of your spaceship. Do not be alarmed as we assure you that you have not come this far to lose your lives in crashing.*

The rush of atmosphere outside was a loud shrill scream now. The temperature gauges had climbed well past the danger point and were still going up. Wildly Jeremy realized that even if the voice which had spoken wordlessly to him were wrong about the crash, still the *Star of Magellan* would have made its last blast-off. For the frictional heating of the spaceship's hull and the subsequent cooling which would follow would render the ship unspaceworthy.

Only there was to be no subsequent cooling.

There was a split-second feeling of fantastic gravitational pressure. It was so swift, though, that it was more an intellectual awareness of what the pressure and the pain might have been than an actual experiencing of them. What followed was sheer lunacy.

It was like a motion picture.

The most realistic motion picture Jeremy had ever seen.

It was a motion picture of a spaceship crashing at thousands of miles per hour in rolling hill country. It was magnificently realistic, except that somehow the motions seemed slowed down.

There was one thing totally unexpected in the motion picture. Jeremy was not on the outside somewhere, looking in.

Jeremy was right in the middle of it.

The *Star of Magellan* struck earth, and exploded violently. Not off to one side. All around Jeremy. It crumpled, accordioning instantly. It crumpled some more, and the atomic engines attained critical mass.

It was now not merely a realistic motion picture of a crashing spaceship. It was now a realistic motion picture of a baby atomic bomb exploding.

The atomic bomb was the crashing spaceship. And Jeremy and Captain Eunice were still inside.

It was, literally, an atomic explosion. For the stored atomic fuel in the rocket engines had reached critical mass when the fuel tanks imploded.

And Jeremy was in the middle of it.

JEREMY KNEW, instinctively, that this was no motion picture, that this was really happening. Atomic explosion. Heat to match the interior, of a star. Light which would blind in a fraction of a millionth of a second. Millions of pounds of pressure to the square inch here at ground zero, where mass was converted instantly to energy.

What had the voice said? A field of occlusion? Something like

that. It was possible, Jeremy knew. The unified field theory made it possible — made all such fields possible. For fields of energy made up the entire universe according to the theory, now virtually an established fact. If all-inclusive fields of energy, why not fields of null-energy?

An occlusion field. An absolute shield against radioactive death, heat death, pressure death

The atomic mushroom broiled outward. It was not a very big atomic explosion, as atomic explosions go. Two hundredths of a megaton, perhaps. Somehow Jeremy knew that. He did not know how he knew, but he accepted the knowledge. He also of course did not see the actual shape of the atomic mushroom because he stood at ground zero where the pulverized, slagged, vaporized spaceship had been.

You will now sleep, the voice said.

Instantly, Jeremy slept.

When he awoke, the atomic cloud was gone from their immediate vicinity. Above them, however, the mushroom hung tenuously in the sky. Twenty-four hours? guessed Jeremy. From ground zero the cloud might look like that after twenty-four hours, on Earth.

It looked like Earth, too, this

invisible planet at the core of the galaxy — what could be seen of it beyond the atomic crater and the fused green expanse beyond it. It was pleasantly hilly and there were large trees and beyond them high on a hill was a white building.

You will, said the voice, and stopped.

CHAPTER IX

WILL? Will what? wondered Jeremy.

But the voice was silent.

"Did you hear it?" Jeremy asked Captain Eunice.

"Started to say something," the crone told him. "Then just stopped without any warning but why be concerned about that? There's something you really can be concerned about. We have no spaceship, Jeremy! No spaceship. Even if we find the Fountain of Forever, we'll never be able to return to the civilized worlds."

Jeremy started, then relaxed. Maybe, maybe not. But that was something he couldn't change, whatever the answer would be. And Pha Ioult — what about Pha Ioult? He'd been given a spaceship, hadn't he? Given? Then by whom?

The voices? thought Jeremy. By the voices. But the voices were

silent now.

Jeremy turned to stare at the high hill on which stood the white building. On closer study, though, Jeremy wasn't certain that he saw an enclosed, roofed-in structure. It seemed more a four-sided stoa, a covered porch with simple, Ionic-like columns. And figures could be seen around it, from this distance looking like tiny midges.

They were, Jeremy realized, men.

He pointed and watched as Captain Eunice squinted her rheumy eyes. The tiny figures of men up there seemed to be milling about the white stone structure uncertainly, although it was hard to make anything out from this distance. Jeremy offered the crone a quizzical look, and she shrugged.

"You're thinking it's the Fountain?" she asked.

"I was under the impression the elixir flowed everywhere on the World of the Fountain. But maybe it's a shrine — with a Fountain in it. Why don't we find out?"

"Why?" cackled the crone. "I'll tell you why. Because if I was Tobias Greggs and I had just tasted of the waters of the Fountain and they made me young again, eternally young, my next thought would be to guard the

Fountain as my own possession. You see?"

"But if all the waters of this planet —"

"It doesn't matter. Then Tobias Greggs would want to guard the whole planet, to keep it for himself, perhaps to bottle and distribute the elixir and to become the most powerful man in the history of the galaxy through it. I would, I know."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Haven't decided yet. Work my way up there, maybe. Sneak up, I mean. Find the location of the Fountain and drink of it before they can stop me. Look at me, Jeremy Armitage. I'm an old hag — a hag! Once I was beautiful. Once —"

But Jeremy no longer was listening. It was Captain Eunice's affair if she wanted to all but crawl up the hillside on her belly. Jeremy hadn't come for the elixir. Jeremy had come for Jo. He said a brief goodbye to Captain Eunice and went swinging off toward the foot of the hill, making no attempt to hide himself. Once he looked back and found that Captain Eunice was gone. He shrugged, kept walking, and soon began to climb.

The climb was steeper than he had thought. When he had cov-

ered half of it he was filmed with sweat and his breath came short and raggedly. He looked back and still could see nothing of Captain Eunice. But from his vantage point halfway up the hill toward the strange white structure, he could see a great deal of the surrounding countryside. He found it was dotted with atomic craters. He could see close to a dozen from the ledge on which he was standing, waiting while he got a second wind. Apparently the *Ponce De Leon* and the *Star of Magellan* were far from the first spaceships to crash here, Jeremy assumed that Tobias Greggs' bigger ship had met a fate similar to their own.

Then, what had happened to their crews? Shrugging and not hazarding a guess at an answer he could not know, Jeremy went on up the hill. Tobias Greggs' crew hadn't seen him yet, and now that he was mounting steadily up the side of the hill, with the rocky, sparsely treed flank of the hill above him and to his left, they could not see him at all.

When he had covered three quarters of the distance up hill, Jeremy saw the first children.

THERE WERE hundreds of them, and infants was a bet-

ter word. They were toddlers or crawlers and certainly none of them was old enough to talk. They were basking naked in the bright daylight on a ledge outside a cave quite close to Jeremy. They seemed entirely indifferent to him at first. Then one of them giggled. It was soon taken up as a chorus, all the infants giggling at Jeremy. Something was very funny to them, devilishly funny. At Jeremy's expense? He didn't know, but he would find out nothing here for, excepting the almost insane laughter, the children could not communicate with him at all.

Jeremy walked across the ledge carefully and was conscious of tiny hands plucking at his boots. The children were still giggling when Jeremy passed and continued on his way.

There were two more caves and two more throngs of giggling children before Jeremy reached the top of the hill. From this height he could see a great way. What would have been a splendid green sylvan world was marred by the apparently ubiquitous atomic craters. Each crater — a spaceship, although many of what Jeremy called craters were merely crater-shaped depressions in the ground, now covered with trees, grass, rocks. Jeremy assumed that

these once, many years ago, had been craters.

Then had acolytes of eternal youth been visiting the Fountain of Forever for generations? It seemed quite possible. Earth was not the first starworld to achieve interstellar flight. Especially here at the hub of the galaxy, where interstellar distances were more nearly interplanetary, where the challenge of stellar intercourse was greater, interstellar flight had developed more quickly and had plotted the course of human development for hundreds of years. Then, was the World of the Fountain once not shrouded in mystery? Jeremy doubted that. Not, at least, he decided, during the time span covered by the craters and crater-like depressions. For these represented violent crashes, even if the crews of the ships had been rescued by the incredible fields of occlusion. And the voices.

The voices, Jeremy suddenly thought. Silent now.

He rounded a turn in the path and the flank of the hill disappeared. Or rother, he had climbed over it. He stood on the summit and the summit turned out to be a plateau a couple of hundred yards across.

Directly in its center stood the stoa-like structure, perhaps seventy-five yards square. Sur-

rounding it were several score men, all Earthmen, Jeremy realized. Pretty obviously, this was the crew of the *Ponce De Leon*.

At first Jeremy saw what he took for some kind of ceremony obscurely religious perhaps. This wasn't possible, though, and he knew it. He couldn't fathom a ready-made religious ceremony for arrivees at an unknown world.

Presently what seemed obscure ceremony began to make sense. It was not ceremony at all. It was rapt attention. It was such utter attention that although Jeremy stood in plain view across hardly more than fifty yards of barren plateau, no one saw him. All eyes faced the other way, faced toward the roofed, columned stoa.

And toward the machine rolling toward it.

AT FIRST Jeremy didn't recognize the machine. It seemed to be a coffin fashioned of metal and glass and running on wheels with a small turbine engine propelling it. While Jeremy watched, it rolled smoothly through the ranks of Earthmen toward the great white stone stoa. It rolled to a smooth stop only yards from the obscuring shadow of the stoa roof. And then a voice spoke, not the unheard voice of the creature of the Fountain, whatever it was,

but an Earthman's voice, an old voice, a tired ancient voice amplified by electronics equipment but still so weak it was barely above a whisper. The silence, however, was absolute, and Jeremy heard every word the old man's voice said. He knew at once that the coffin-like object, the coffin on wheels, was an umblic—short for umbilical or, actually, gerontological incubator. The very old, the moribund among the civilized worlds, often resorted to an umblic if they wanted to cheat death for another few days or weeks, possibly months. Maintaining warmth and moisture and aiding feeble fast-running-down senile metabolism, the umblic could maintain life in senility as its first cousin the incubator could maintain life in premature birth. And now Tobias Greggs spoke to his crew from the umblic-on-wheels which had been his home all during the journey of the *Ponce De Leon*.

"Men," he said, "although our ship is now radioactive slag, take heart — for its name was prophetic. Here before us, finally, is the font of all our dreams and yearnings. The Fountain of Forever is ours, men! On this historic occasion my grandson, Tobias Greggs III and certainly no youngster himself —" the old

voice tittered and there was a suggestion of laughter from the crowd — "will lift me from the umblic and dip my withered body into the waters of eternal youth. For I hold it my own right to be first to attain eternal youth and immortality, since I led you all here and made this, the realization of our fondest dreams, possible.

"After me, the Fountain of Forever waits for the rest of you. I am glad none of you now feel I was impetuous by sending my grandson in there to put an end to that broadcaster." So that, Jeremy thought, was how the voice had been stilled. Although strangely, Tobias Greggs referred to whatever mechanism had sent out telepathic messages only as a broadcaster, as if, indeed, it had spoken in mere words. "But —" laughter from the umblic now — "the voice simply wouldn't shut up. You all heard how it put restraints and restrictions on our use of the elixir, how it made provisions and conditions, how it tried to foist its archaic ancient regulations on us although it had not the power to enforce a single one of them. The way it insisted, for example, that the Fountain be open to all humanity, with no profit or reward or distinction to those of us who had

blazed a pathway across the stars to it. That, naturally, was intolerable. Men, you know the articles of ownership, as drawn up by my grandson under my express instructions. Each of you, upon bathing in the waters of eternity and being vouch-safed immortality, will own one quarter of one per cent of the Fountain. Tobias Greggs III will own a full ten per cent and I the remaining fifty per cent. Perhaps your shares sound obscurely small, but need I remind you that the entire galactic system will come crawling to us and that thus each of your quarter per cent shares represents a very great fortune?

"In short, men, I am about to be granted immortality and unheard of power. After me, the rest of you. Are you ready?"

A great roar went up and Jeremy saw a smallish old man well advanced beyond middle-age lift the lid of the coffin-like umblic and reach inside almost tenderly for its burden. What he drew out, Jeremy saw, could hardly be called human. What he drew out had once been a man, of course — before advanced senility and the dissolution of death through old age had set in. Dissolution, yes, but not death. For the umblic had preserved its bur-

den. But withered and twisted and bent and incredibly ugly and gray-skinned with stick-like limbs and a death's-head face, the thing inside the umblic was alive.

Tobias Greggs III, carrying his burden, walked within the stoa.

Just then, there was a disturbance from the other side of the plateau. Men ran, voices shouted — and a figure plunged through and within the stoa.

A dozen men surged after it — and then Jeremy recognized their quarry. It was Captain Eunice.

Despite her fears she had come up the hillside with Jeremy, unknown to him. Actually, she had used Jeremy as a decoy. While he climbed one side of the hill she had gone up the other side. She had decided, concluded Jeremy that her best chance to reach the Fountain was surprise and that once given the immortality the Fountain alone could bestow, she would be spared as a fellow immortal by Tobias Greggs' crew.

And it looked to Jeremy as if she might get away with at least the first part of her plan. For she had rushed through the crowd almost before they were aware of her presence. She plunged inside the stoa at precisely the same moment that Tobias Greggs,

grandfather Tobias I cradled in his arms, went inside. And disappeared.

There were more shouts and the mob of Earthmen stamped inside the stoa, apparently deciding that while they would allow their benefactor — the man who had brought them here — first crack at the Fountain, they would allow no strange old woman second crack. Jeremy heard, or thought he heard, a pair of splashes inside the stoa. Then he realized that this was his own opportunity too. He was an Earthman. They were all pushing within the stoa in confusion. One Earthman more would hardly be questioned. One Earthman more — looking for Jo.

BOLDLY, Jeremy threw himself into the melee. In seconds he was engulfed in a sea of thrashing arms and legs, heaving bodies, passionately angry voices. He fought and struggled with them in an attempt to get through, for now he had seen Jo with his own eyes not twenty yards ahead of him, held in tow by the red-haired giant Cowper. At first this surprised Jeremy. Cowper seemed too level-headed at their own brief meeting to be Tobias Greggs' handpicked guard. But then it occurred to Jeremy that Cowper's very level-

headedness was precisely the reason. On a long lonely space voyage, Cowper had probably been used to protect Jo from the others aboard the *Ponce De Leon*.

"Jo!" Jeremy cried at the top of his voice, but the sound was immediately swallowed by the shouts and roars of the Earthmen fighting each other to get inside the stoa.

"Jo!" he called again, then realized it was useless. Someone clawed at his face and, defensively, he struck out with his fist and heard an oath and the clawing arms fell away. He fought on through the crowd and advanced with it slowly within the shadow of the stoa.

Time and again he felt his arms imprisoned by the press of other arms and other bodies, countless times he had to use his fists again to get through. But he wasn't the only one and no one had questioned his identity. If they did now, he thought, if for a moment it occurred to any of them that he did not belong, that he was not a member of the crew, they might do anything. It was as if the lust after the Fountain of Forever of a hundred stellar races had been concentrated in several score Earthmen who had come this far

and were fanatically determined to keep the Fountain for themselves

Finally, Jeremy was within the stoa. Here, suddenly, the milling and pushing stopped. Here the men stood about in unexpected confusion.

And gawked at the Fountain.

They stood in a broad courtyard, in deep shadow. At the center of the square courtyard was a depression, a pool. It was round in shape, no more than a dozen yards across. In its very center and bubbling in a frothy silver shimmering column was — the Fountain of Forever.

Two figures stood in the pool, dripping wet. So far, they alone had tasted of the waters of the Fountain. They were dripping, they were covered with the silver liquid, they were old and bent and crooked and in their passionate, almost insane enthusiasm they had stripped off their clothing and stood naked in the waters of the elixir.

And feebly, they were fighting. They struck at each other with hands like claws, like talons. They jabbered and flew at one another in senile rages. It was a ludicrous fight. And it brought the thronging Earthmen to a dead stop.

It was a ludicrous fight — at

first. Tobias Greggs, late of an umblic but at least needing no umblic now, fighting tooth and nail with Captain Eunice, not many months away from an umblic herself.

A ludicrous fight at first.

But it did not remain ludicrous. Even as they fought, the combatants — changed!

Their flesh seemed to fill out, to grow firm, their bent, twisted withered shoulders straightened and rounded. Their limbs straightened too, the silver fluids flowing off the now supple flesh. And their faces — their faces like their bodies were changing, growing younger. The weak, ineffectual blows became more lusty. They could, and did, hurt each other, the now athletic man and the equally athletic and beautiful woman.

How old had they been? Both near a hundred, without doubt. The old man probably more than a hundred, Jeremy thought wildly. And now? he fifty and she forty? Even as the thoughts ran through his mind he had to amend them. He thirty and she twenty? Naked and dripping wet and young and struggling breast to breast now and —

SEEING the change before their very eyes, the men

went mad with desire. Except for the panting, struggling Tobias Greggs and Captain Eunice, both young now, he a handsome man in his mid-twenties and she in her teens, he gaining the upper hand now and forcing her head slowly underwater — except for them, the silence was complete.

"Eternal life!" a man screamed suddenly, and that broke the spell. They all plunged forward together, as if one command controlled them, one great brain governed all the bodies. They swept forward and into the pool and over the still struggling Greggs and Captain Eunice.

All? Not all. Jeremy remained behind. And a few others. Cowper and Jo were there, and three other men. "Jo!" Jeremy called and this time she heard him, smiled at him

"Come on," one of the waiting men said, grabbing her arm. "He's had you long enough. We're going into the pool. We're going to get immortality together!" He placed his hand boldly on Jo's body, but Cowper hit him and he stumbled back, falling to his knees.

The second man came up behind Cowper. Jeremy shouted a warning — too late. The second man swung something up and

then down in a brutal blurring arc and it felled Cowper instantly, the giant not making a sound as he went down. Then the first man climbed unsteadily to his feet and the two of them dragged Jo again toward the Fountain.

"Jeremy!" she screamed. "Jeremy, help!"

Five sprinting strides brought Jeremy to them. He tugged at a thick shoulder and spun a man around and hit him and the man staggered back but did not go down. His companion continued to drag Jo toward the Fountain and she fought him, holding back, loathe to taste of its waters as somehow Jeremy was loathe to taste of them.

They were on the edge of the Fountain, the scores of Earthmen wading waist-deep and splashing happily within the pool now, when Jeremy reached them. Jeremy leaped at the man, locking knees around his waist and looping one arm around his neck. But the man kept going, into the pool. At the last moment, Jeremy let go of him and dropped off. His attack, though, had freed Jo, which is what he had wanted, for he had no fight with the Earthman.

For a moment they held each other there at the edge of the

pool and watched the men like animals, like dazed, drunken, wild animals splashing and gurgling and dipping their heads in the elixir and ripping off their clothing to bathe their bodies in it and laughing exultantly. Even Tobias Greggs and Captain Eunice, a young god and goddess now, had stopped their fighting and stood directly under the Fountain in each other's embrace. Then Jeremy looked at Jo and said no words. But his eyes said, "Let's get out of here," and Jo nodded also wordlessly.

Between them they managed to drag the barely conscious Cowper outside with them. He was hardly conscious of his words but said, "No Fountain . . . don't want . . . Fountain. Immortality . . . mankind isn't ready . . ."

As if his words had triggered it, the unheard voice spoke again. *I am but a robotic sentience. You try to destroy me, but I cannot be destroyed. I was planted by the first devotee at this shrine and I too exist forever. Those of you who have achieved immortality, go — the caves with their nectar and ambrosia are waiting for you. And those of you who, for whatever reasons, have not tasted of the Fountain — something else*

waits. A spaceship For those who tasted of these waters, eternal youth. Indeed, eternal youth. For you others, you pitifully few others — a message. when mankind is ready for eternal youth, for true eternal youth on his own terms, he will not have to seek it here, he will have it at his fingertips

The voice was silent. But outside, a silver spaceship was waiting.

"What did the voice mean, Jeremy?" Jo asked before they got inside.

Cowper shrugged and Jeremy said, "I don't know, but I can take a guess —"

He didn't have to, though. For now the Earthmen were coming out after them.

On their hands and knees.

Crawling.

Because infants crawl.

Because they were infants.

"Oh, God!" Jo cried. The infants crawled across the ground toward them. Some of them had begun to giggle. By two's and three's along the way they were distracted — distracted by bright rocks or bushes growing out of the hard ground, or one another's bare, glistening skin. "God," Jo repeated. "Will they live forever — like that?"

"Like that," Cowper said so-

berly.

"And if we tell this story back on Kadwon or Earth," Jeremy said, "who'll believe us?"

"But surely —" Jo began.

"Don't you see? People believe only what they want. Nobody will want to believe us. So —"

"So they'll keep coming here to the World of the Fountain," Cowper finished for him.

They went inside the spaceship.

Jeremy sat down at the controls. They were unfamiliar, but he thought he could understand them. "Crash hammocks," he

said. "Take your positions."

But he felt Jo's cool hand on his own. "I don't know about eternal youth," she said. "They can have that, I guess. But I like my men young, all right. Like you, Jeremy. Maybe I'm just foolish and can't really understand it yet, but you know something? I think I'd like the idea of slowly growing old together — with you . . ."

Five minutes later, they blasted off. Growing old together might take some sixty or seventy years — and they were beginning as of now.



Bowman of Mons



UNTIL a few years ago the most famous story to come out of the First World War was about the strange incident of the Bowman of Mons. It was on this French battlefield that supposedly a mysterious archer dressed like the famous English bowman of Agincourt appeared to the battle-weary English soldiers and inspired them with his presence to fight off an almost irresistible German attack. As wonderful as the story sounds, it turns out to have been entirely the work of an author's imagination. But so believable was the story that somehow it became established in fact, until recently.

Fiction or facts, stories of the mythical inspirers have always been with us, from Joan of Arc's tale to

the more modern Little Flower. The question is, where does myth end and fact emerge, for it goes without saying that there is some validity to the claims made for these mystical inspirations. The "hallucinations" of the psychologist aren't simply good enough. There is more to it than that. Religious mysticism, both Occidental and Oriental can be shrugged off, but it can never be laughed at for it has changed the face of the world.

Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha — all have had their mystic overtones, and look what they did! But you don't have to go to antiquity to seek out confirmed stories of experience which border on the mystic and yet which are as real as concrete. The snake-handlers, the

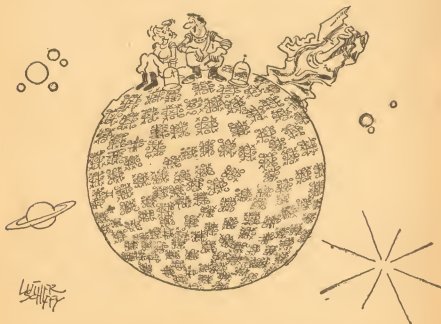
fire-walkers, the Yogi, the faith-healers, all have accumulated a vast body of fact and observation which defies analysis by conventional means.

Science is baffled by these phenomena—and regards them respectfully. Even in the matter of the legend of the Bowman of Mons, investigators were astounded when they talked with so-called “eyewitnesses.” “But Mr. Blank,” they said, “you couldn’t have seen the Bowman on the battlefield since he was purely a figment of an author’s mind.” Quietly the questionee would answer, “but I saw him. I know. I was at Mons and I clear-

ly remember!” How do you account for that?

If it were simply a case of one man saying the same thing, or even a few, the whole thing could easily be dismissed as a mass hallucination. But when hundreds testify to the same thing, you’ve run into a problem.

Whatever the answer, we can be sure that there is more to this world than meets the eye, or the probing instruments of the scientist. And even the scientists have backed down from their impregnable positions. “We don’t know,” they reply to the mystics, “we simply don’t know . . .”



"Sooner or later we're going to have a recreation problem."

THE FINAL QUARRY

by

Adam Chase

If you're crazy enough to go hunting for a space ghost just remember that this alien life form is just as crazy to hunt you. Even more so!

I KNEW it was going to be one of those trips when we were five hours out of Ring City.

You could see it in their faces. There were three of them aboard my safari ship, a beat up old tub which had made the run from Ophiuchus to Deneb for more years than I've been around, before I bought her cheap and refit her battered bulkheads for hunting. Three of them, and two straight out from Earth. That's rare out here: we don't get many Earth folks in Ring City. We don't get them beyond Ophiuchus at all, I don't know why. Maybe it's because what with the star clouds and dust swarms out here you can't even see Earth with the biggest telescope we have, or Earth's primary, Sol, either.

Anyhow, the Earth people were a man and his wife, both young and dressed a million credits

worth and she pretty enough to make you homesick for the planet that gave birth to us all, even if you've never seen it. She was a tall girl, Mrs. Lydia Morrell, with that pale blonde hair which is such a rarity out beyond Ophiuchus, and with safari clothing sold only in the best shops from Deneb to Centauri and never out here, and with eyes absolutely as green as they told you the oceans of Earth were, and with a figure that would make the nonogenarians who saw her go running for the nearest phial of hormones.

That was Mrs. Morrell. Her husband was a big guy, quiet and maybe a little on the stuffy side, with a beefy red face and sagging pouches of dissipation under his eyes from spending too much money on too many of the wrong things. I didn't like the way he kept looking at Mrs. Morrell and



Illustrated by W. E. Terry

at first I couldn't put my finger on why I didn't like it. Hell, they were husband and wife. He could look at her any way he wanted to or not look at her at all, that was their business. But he gazed cowed at his beautiful wife. He was moonstruck, was Philip Morrell.

The third member of our party

was an Ophiuchan colonist named Chubbs. It surprised the devil out of me, finding Chubbs here, finding him on the paying end of a hunting expedition. Because I'd met Chubbs before and he wasn't what they call a socialite. Chubbs had served as first-mate on a ship not much bigger than my own *Ring*

Around, or as safari leader on the game farms of Kendrick's Planet, or as anything that would get him a fast buck, to use an anachronism, from the inworld tourists. He was thirty-five, maybe; a few years older than I am. He had knocked around plenty but was still what the dames would call an attractive hunk of man.

And Lydia Morrell was calling him that with her eyes. It was so obvious that I knew it within a few hours after we'd blasted off out of Ring City, and I was plenty busy with the force-net apparatus and the wide-range stunners and the spray-on spacesuits and the other safari equipment we would need. What Lydia Morrell was doing was so obvious you positively could not miss it.

ORDINARILY, I like to live and let live. The Morrells could make anything they wanted to out of their married life. It was their baby to play with. But not on safari. Not on this kind of safari. They had all three signed a little form before we left Ring City and the form said I was not to be held responsible in the event of accident or accidental death during the Ghost Hunt and the form wasn't fooling. In a way, hunting lions with a switch-blade knife was safer than Ghost Hunting. At least you knew if you stuck

the lion in exactly the right place, even if the odds were a thousand to one against you so sticking him, he would die. You couldn't predict the Ghosts, though, at all. Which meant that all of us had to be on our toes. I'm a guide and I've seen the Ghosts before and I've hunted them, but I'm vulnerable too. Mr. Morrell moonstruck for his wife and his wife moonstruck for Chubbs was not my idea of ideal hunting companions.

Five hours out of Ring City we entered the luminous zone on the fringe of the ring nebula. As you know, a ring nebula is also called a planetary nebula because of what's inside lighting up the interstellar gas. Actually, though, it's not a planet. It's a star which once, a few hundred million years ago, went nova. The ring — the cloud of luminous gas surrounding a couple of square light years of space and a solitary ex-nova of a star — is luminous with reflected starlight. It's one of the wonders of the stellar system and everyone who wants to say he's been around sees at least one ring nebula before he goes back to Earth or Fomalhaut VII or wherever he came from. And it's also one of the wonders of the stellar system for another reason.

Ghosts don't like light and they don't like luminous gases. Any Ghosts inside the ring of a ring

nebula will stay inside there for all eternity — or until they are hunted by people with a lot of money and a lot of free time and years of being jaded on almost every other thrill a galaxy two hundred thousand light years from stem to stern has to offer. Ghosts, you see, are my business, but not the kind of ghosts that inhabit haunted houses and get their kicks out of moaning and howling and chain-dragging. Not, in short, make believe ghosts.

Real Ghosts, with a capital G — and the only way to tell you about them is to tell you this story of Lydia Morrell and her husband, and their hunting partner Charlie Chubbs whom I'd met once or twice on the Fun Worlds of Ophiuchus.

WELL, we went through the ring on sub-space drive and I cut the drive off when we cleared the inside of the luminous envelope and cut on the rockets. There was a thump-throb, thump-throb, thump-throb down in the bowels of the ship as the rocket engine took over from the sub-space drive, and the sound made the moonstruck Philip Morrell restless. It will do that to a man sometimes, after the utter silence of the sub-space drive. He got up and came over to where I was checking the force-net apparatus

a third time and he said:

"So we just come rocketing in here and you guarantee we bag some Ghosts."

I shook my head. "I don't guarantee the bag, Mr. Morrell. I guarantee we see them. I'll spot them for you on the radarscope as proof. The bag is up to all of us, and up to the Ghosts. Like any other living creatures, they don't like to be captured." I added, "Or killed. Because you can't take a Ghost alive, you know, and bring it over to Hendricks' Planet for the bounty. You take Ghosts dead or you don't take them at all."

Morrell said, "I still can't believe they're actually living creatures."

I shrugged. "A lot of people have that reaction. But they're alive, all right. Biologists say so. Anyhow, you never saw what a Ghost can do when it's fighting for its life."

"But how can a living creature exist out in cold, black, empty space?" Morrell asked me. "With no air to breathe, with no—"

"You say that because we assume all life to be like man. Anthropomorphically, if you don't mind the fifty credit word, Mr. Morrell, we figure in advance that all living things, like all living on Earth, must live on a carbon cycle world. But hell, there's silicate cycle life on the Canopian planets and halogen life on MacArthur

IX."

"But those are planets, at least!" Morrell protested.

"And the Ghosts live in empty space. So what? Almost half the matter in the galaxy exists in so-called empty space, in the hydrogen clouds, the dust swarms, the incandescent gases. If half the matter exists in empty space, bearing no relationship to stars or planets, why not some of the life too? Why not the Ghosts?"

"But are they — protoplasmic?"

I grinned at him as I gave the wide-range stunners—hand weapons which would look just like light to us and be hardly more effective but which would be deadly to the diffuse Ghosts — a third check out. I said, "There you go carbon cycling. Why do they have to be protoplasmic? The only thing we can say for sure about life is that it has sentience. On Earth and some other worlds it happens to be protoplasmic. That doesn't mean a thing universally, does it? Hell, the Ghosts are your answer. They're not protoplasmic."

Morrell's face screwed up for a frown, but just then the radar-scope bells clanged and I sprinted through the hatch and forward. Morrell, a professional hunter eager to see the ultimate in big game, came sprinting right on my heels. Lydia Morrell and Chubbs had heard the clanging radar-scope

bells too, but they didn't come forward with us. At the time, Morrell and I were too excited to notice it — but we noticed it later, all right.

THE ALARM bells were still clanging when we reached the radar-scope. I'd mounted one of those three-up screens on the fore bulkhead between the instrument panel and the foreport. I didn't actually need it that big or that prominent: I'm no myopic astrogator, thank you. But I'm a safariman and I'd learned years ago my hunters hike to be able to see what they're paying me to find for them.

There were no little pips dancing back and forth across the three-up screen, like you'd see if your ship entered a meteor swarm. Instead, an uncertain grayness covered the usually dazzling white surface of the three-up screen, covered it — pulsing and throbbing almost like something alive.

"There's your Ghost," I told Morrell, pointing at the scope-screen.

"I don't get it. I never saw a radar-screen behave like that before."

"Hold on to your hat," I said. "We're inside the Ghost."

Morrell looked at me for a second. Then his face went white. "Inside? God, Pete. You mean it swallowed us?"

I shook my head, laughing. "Ghosts don't eat solid matter, either metallic like the *Ring Around* or protoplasmic like us. Oh, they'd eat our atmosphere if they could get at it, but they don't have any digestive juices that can work on the *Ring Around's* hull. The plastic of our spray-ons is another matter."

"You mean they can eat their way inside our spacesuits —"

"Given a few hours, they can."

"Then why don't you people give us regular, old-fashioned spacesuits?"

"We can if you want to go bumbling about space like a cross between a lifeboat and what Captain Ahab was hunting. The spray-ons are safe enough, Mr. Morrell, provided you all do as you're told out there."

"Well, all right, Pete. You're the boss. It's what we're paying you for, I guess. Anyhow, how do we get out of the Ghost's body?"

"You're forgetting, Mr. Morrell. A Ghost doesn't have a body as we know it. In a sense a Ghost is incorporeal, like its namesake. All we have to do is rocket out because a Ghost is only a loose agglomeration of atoms, a thinking nebulousity, if you want to call it that."

"But the trophies —" Morrell said vaguely.

"You didn't read the primer we gave you, I take it. A Ghost looks

like a Ghost trophy only after it's been stunned and killed."

"God, they're beautiful!" Morrell said with the passionate longing of the hunter. "Have you seen them up close, Pete? Are they as beautiful as their pictures? If they are, then I've got to have one back home with me. I've got most everything else, Pete," he went on enthusiastically, wistfully. "All the Earth game: lions and tigers and a bull moose head which is a big one and kudo and even oryx: they're almost extinct. I've got everything you can hunt on Kendrick's Planet, too. But I don't have a Ghost. All I have is pictures. I never even saw a Ghost trophy in the flesh." He looked at me. He smiled. There was, of course, no flesh. But I liked his enthusiasm.

They're beautiful, all right. But it's something — almost like your deepest religious feelings —which you just don't talk about. When a Ghost dies, a few hundred thousand square miles of sentient nebulosity crystalizes into an enormous single crystalline structure like a many-colored, fantastically-magnified snow-flake. They're as big as a man and more beautiful than the most beautiful woman who ever lived, with a kind of serene, utterly detached, indifferent, cold but somehow eternal beauty. A good Ghost trophy will bring as

high as a quarter of a million credits on the black market and if you're the kind of person who can get enthused over a sailfish hanging above the mantelpiece or a spread-antlered elk head, better save up your credits and come hunting for Ghosts.

That's what they're like, but you don't talk about it. "They're beautiful," I said. "They look like their pictures."

"What do we do now?"

"We drive out of the Ghost and hover nearby and tell the others and get our hunting gear."

Morrell nodded. He was smiling slightly and I saw that his hands were trembling. "I haven't felt like this," he admitted, "since I shot my first quail. But I was just a kid, then, Pete." He went ahead of me, gesturing enthusiastically. "Let's go tell the others."

THEY WERE waiting in the lounge cabin: Morrell's beautiful wife Lydia and Charlie Chubbs, whom they had picked up on one of the Fun Worlds as a drinking and hunting companion. You could call it waiting if you want. I don't call it waiting.

They rushed apart like two magnetic north poles when we entered, but I had seen plenty and I was behind Morrell. They smiled foolishly and there were drinks on the cocktail table in

front of them and they picked up the drinks and sloshed some of the liquid out in their haste and drank what was in the cocktail glasses without tasting it and gave us those foolish smiles again and then Mr. Morrell knew without being told what his wife's moon-struck look had failed to tell him before.

I waited for the fireworks, but there weren't any. Chubbs stared insolently at Mr. Morrell, then saw his own face in the wall mirror behind us, and hastily wiped lipstick off his lips and cheek with a handkerchief. Morrell said nothing. Morrell didn't even look at his wife. He stared at Chubbs, though, a long time, until Chubbs looked away, a faint smirk on his face. What the hell, the smirk said, Mrs. Lydia Morrell is a big girl now. If she wants to play, she wants to play . . .

Morrell let the smirk ride too. All he said was: "Pete's cornered a Ghost."

"Already?" Lydia asked.

"Already."

"We're ready to hunt," I said. "That is, if you still want to hunt."

"Hell yes we still want to hunt," Chubbs said, defiantly.

"Philip?" Lydia Morrell said her husband's name, with a question after it.

"Of course," Morrell said, then turned to me. Let's get this saf-

ari on the road, Pete."

I shrugged. It was his wife and his life. But I knew that wasn't the answer, not really. It was the Ghost. A hunter's life led, naturally, to the Ghosts which can be found in the stellar system's ring nebulae. Philip Morrell had his chance for a Ghost now, and a Ghost trophy. For the time being, nothing else mattered. I had it all figured out.

It's funny, but I was wrong about that.

MORRELL was impatient while I applied the spray-on spacesuit to his body. He lifted his arms when I told him to and pivoted slowly and sat down so I could spray the soles of his shoes. "You wouldn't want an Achilles Heel in deep space," Lydia Morrell quipped, but no one, not even Chubbs laughed.

Chubbs was next, and as it is for some people, the application of the spray-on was a mild sensual pleasure to him. "That tickles, Pete," he said, as I sprayed the white liquid on him. He looked at Lydia and laughed, as if she were tickling him. Pretty soon the white liquid solidified and became completely invisible. But it was, I knew, far stronger than steel and completely airtight and an excellent insulator.

I had already taken care of

Morrell's breathing device, and now I used my diamond-pointed pick on the spray-on which was congealing around Chubbs' mouth and nostrils. After that I gave him an oxygen mask and a small cylinder of compressed oxygen in a shoulder harness and a tiny intercom which attached to one of his molars.

"How does the spray-on feel?" I asked.

"Kind of stiff," Chubbs said.

"It will go away," I told him. "In three minutes, you won't know you're wearing it."

Morrell nodded and Chubbs said: "No wonder these things are putting the vacuum suit people out of business."

Lydia Morrell was next. She was wearing one of those abbreviated costumes which have become so popular with the well-constructed ladies since the spray-on suits have replaced five hundred pounds of metal and ruberoid equipment. Her costume consisted of a shimmering golden and slightly translucent leotard. At least I thought it was slightly translucent. Either you could see, faintly and enticingly, the pink-white tints of Lydia's skin through the shimmering golden leotard, or you saw a pink undercloth made to look like pink and white skin. Whichever it was, it got the results Lydia wanted it to get. I'm a bachelor and I guess

I'll always be one, but if I had been married to a girl as pretty as Lydia Morrell I wouldn't have let her walk around — at least in the vicinity of a Charlie Chubbs or even myself — in a getup like that.

Anyhow, I applied the spray-on to Lydia. She wasn't impatient with it, the way her husband had been. She didn't laugh, as Chubbs had laughed. She just watched me with those big, incredibly green eyes — from a distance of a few inches. Because you have to get close to apply the spray-on. I got real close and applied it, and those eyes followed my eyes and I had to work with my hands very close to her, putting on the spray-on from a distance of three or four inches. All the while, Lydia was very solemn, staring at me, just staring at me. When I finished, when she sat on her shapely fanny and let me spray the soles of her bare feet, she smiled at me.

I wasn't going to kiss her. I couldn't possibly kiss her. I was the hired help and she was the rich Mrs. Morrell. So instead, I wanted to hit her. Morrell looked at me and didn't say anything. Then Chubbs looked at me and smirked. Then, finally, Morrell said, "Let's go out after that Ghost."

"Not yet," I told him as I sprayed myself with the spray-on.

It made a faint hissing sound and felt cool and wet on first contact. Almost immediately, it began to stiffen like a mud-pack. After five minutes I knew from experience I wouldn't even feel it. "Not until you know exactly what we'll be doing," I added, finishing the job on my body and waiting for the rear deck to dry so I could apply spray-on to my shoes.

"Only two weapons are needed to capture and kill a Ghost," I said. "First, there's the force net." I indicated a heavy weapon which I would carry. It looked like an old-fashioned sub-machine gun, but larger. In the *Ring Around's* cabin it weighed plenty but out in deep space, naturally, it would weigh exactly what we weighed, which was absolutely nothing.

"Once I fire the force net at something," I explained, "it will follow the thing's contours. Even if the thing in question is living and so tenuous that it's closer to an absolute vacuum than the best vacuum science has ever been able to produce in a laboratory, the force net will roll over it and ensnare it, a lot like the spray-ons cover us except that the force net renders its wearer immobile. So, we trap the Ghost in our force net. After that —" I handed out the wide-range stunners which, had they been set differently, could be quite lethal to a human being—

"after that, we use our stunners on the Ghost. Then it's all over and you'll be able to watch what you paid for: the slow transformation of a completely invisible, all but incorporeal deep-space creature into a single enormous crystal. Are there any questions?"

"Yeah," Philip Morrell said. "If it's as easy to kill a Ghost as you say, why all the fuss about hunting them?" He sounded disappointed.

I TOLD HIM: "In the first place, they're hard to find. Best place is inside a ring nebula; I already told you why that is. In the second place, killing them isn't as easy as it sounds."

"No?" said Morrell.

"Not by a long shot. Because the Ghosts can think. Because the Ghosts, naturally, don't want to die. Because the Ghosts can project their thoughts and, if we're not all concentrating on what we're doing, stand a good chance of dominating our wills."

"Are you quite serious?" Lydia Morrell wanted to know.

I assured her I was quite serious, then said, "That's one of the reasons, aside from comfort and convenience, we wear spray-ons instead of the old vac-suits. You can't take off a spray-on even if you wanted to. It just wears off."

"You mean to say," Morrell

demanded, "that the Ghosts can make you remove your space-suit and die out there in deep space?"

"Mental suggestion," I nodded. "Mastering your will. Yes, they can, I've seen it happen, Mr. Morrell. It is very important that you believe me."

"What about our air masks then?" Lydia asked.

"You can't remove your own," I pointed out. "Someone has to do it for you, the way the harnesses are set. But even if the Ghost gives you that impulse it's hardly likely anyone will do it since we'll spread out. Any other questions?"

"This mental suggestion," Morrell said. "Exactly how do you fight it?"

I thought of the impulse I had had to kiss his lovely wife. It was like that impulse. It was exactly like fighting off that impulse, because the Ghosts could be as insidious as beautiful women you had no business with. But I didn't say that. I said: "You think of other things. You keep remembering you want to live, not die. You keep remembering what you are and who you are. You keep —"

"For Heaven's sake," Lydia said, smiling at me, "why don't they simply lock on their air-masks and have done with it."

I gave her one of those looks. So did her husband. I didn't have to

answer her. He answered for me. He said, "Because we're hunters, not butchers. Because hunting is a sport — giving the prey a sporting chance. Because they don't hunt lions with atomic rifles or flame throwers. Because they don't catch brook trout on deep-sea gear. You understand?"

Lydia shrugged. Chubbs smiled at her, but her smile was for me now. I was the main attraction at the moment, I held center stage.

"Will the talented Mr. Pete Harrington take us outside now for our Spook?"

"Ghost," said Morrell.

"Ghost," his wife said, as if the nominal difference weren't very important.

"I want that Ghost, Pete," Morrell said, almost devoutly. "I want it very much."

We all went to the airlock. From there you could see the three-up screen, still a pulsing, fluctuating gray.

"Then let's go get it," I said.

WE WENT outside like slow freights, using our wide range stunners for locomotion and floating through space clumsily. There was a brief tie-up at the airlock while my passengers grew accustomed to advancing through space like a rower, firing the stunners before them and riding the wings of Newton's law backwards.

Morrell and Chubbs collided at the outer airlock door and they did a weightless waltz-around until I jetted over to them and straightened out their gravs.

Lydia was laughing. You could hear it over the tooth-anchored intercom. She thought their antics very funny. "Men," she said "are so clumsy," and jetted after me. She added, "But not you, Pete. Not the talented Mr. Harrington."

"What the hell," I told her, "I've been jetting around deep space like this for years. You get used to it." But the others had heard words over the intercom, and that made me feel uneasy. What the hell was on Lydia's mind? Was she getting tired of Chubbs already? I didn't know: I don't know those things about women, I guess. Maybe she just took some kind of pleasure out of baiting her moon-struck husband, knowing he was like that and she could get away with it.

Now that we were in space and had no radar-scope to guide us, the Ghost was completely invisible. Space gleamed and danced with a million million stars, though. Space is crowded out beyond Ophiuchus and a ring nebula works like one-way, polarized glass. From the outside, the ring is luminous and looks like something solid. From the inside it is merely a shimmering aurora-like curtain of light

through which the stars shimmer and pulse. They say it's one of the most beautiful sights you can find anywhere in the galaxy. They say it will remain the galaxy's leading scenic tourist attraction until we build something faster than the sub-space drive and hop outside the Milky Way for an outsider's view of our galaxy pin-wheeling through intergalactic space.

Anyway, I was now ready for step one of our Ghost Hunt, and I told them this over the intercom. "You'll notice," I said in my best professional voice, "that the Ghost is completely invisible at close range. That's because its 'body' is a darned good vacuum. We know it's directly in front of us, though, the radar-scope's told us that. Now, at point-blank range I'm going to fire the force net projector at our Ghost. When I do, you'll suddenly be able to see the creature. The net, you understand, will ensnare it and follow its contours. It will be writhing to beat the devil and maybe lash out with a few pseudopods, but it will be comparatively helpless — except for its mental power, but I already told you about that. So, are you all set?"

They said that they were. "After I net the Ghost," I went on, "we spread out around its 'body' and go to work with the stunners. I

warn you: you may suddenly want to stop; you may suddenly feel sorry for the Ghost, but that's the Ghost, not you, it's the Ghost projecting, and if you let it get the better of you, next thing you know you'll be trying to remove one another's air helmets. Once we start with the stunners, nothing is to stop us. Nothing, is that clear? We'll need the power of all four stunners going at once to kill the Ghost. Less than that and it will remain too strong mentally for too long and will be a question of who is hunting whom."

I wanted to keep them on their toes, but I didn't want to scare them unnecessarily. I figured I had gone far enough and I didn't want any of them to go into a funk over what I'd said. So, without any warning, I lifted the now-weightless force net projector and fired it point-blank at what looked like empty space in front of us.

And space boiled.

THE FORCE NET rolled like a golden waterfall, along the Ghost's surface. The Ghost writhed and pseudopods whipped through space. The golden waterfall of the force net outlined the pseudopods and that part of the vast, shapeless body which we could see. The net rolled quickly along, thinning, spreading out. Pretty soon all of space in front of

us and for a considerable distance to either side was pulsating with a golden, semi-transparent glow.

I heard their startled oaths over the intercom. They hadn't expected anything like this, hadn't expected the Ghost to appear so suddenly and so clearly, netted by my projector. They were still unprepared when I shouted: "Now spread out and start firing!"

Morrell, with the instincts of the hunter, was the first to obey. He drifted over to my left, using the stunner for locomotion, and when he had gone far enough he used the stunner as a weapon, firing it at the golden sheen of the ensnared Ghost. Every time he fired, of course, the reaction drove him back away from the Ghost through space. Pretty soon he had to reverse the stunner and use it for locomotion again and start the procedure once more when he neared the Ghost a second time. And every pale silver charge from the wide-beam stunner seemed to make the Ghost shrivel, like meat broiling over a very hot flame. But that didn't stop it from sending out the whipping, writhing pseudopods.

Soon after her husband had swung into action, Lydia ranged herself about a mile down the great curving flank of the Ghost and fired her own weapon at it. Two in line and one to go, I thought. I was anxious to get my

own stunner into line but I was also responsible for the three members of my safari. And Chubbs was still to make his move.

"Help!" he croaked suddenly, hoarsely. The word thundered through the intercom because all of us had been utterly silent for several seconds. "Help!" he cried again, and this time it was a scream of sheer panic.

A pseudopod of the Ghost flicked out suddenly, at Chubbs. For a split-second I thought Chubbs had panicked via mental suggestion, thought the pseudopod was a coincidence and wouldn't hurt Chubbs anyway, since he was encased in his spray-on. But the Ghosts have sensory organs we still don't understand, and one of these organs can sense the presence — and availability — of the gases it likes to eat. One of these gases is oxygen.

Chubbs screamed a third time as I jetted toward him with my stunner.

It was too late. I knew it was too late before I had covered half the distance. The Ghost's pseudopod flickered out again. This time it found Chubbs. This time it did not lash back into the pulsing golden body. This time it remained. It seemed to circle Chubbs' neck, not constrictingly like a noose but softly, silkily, like Chubbs' favorite scarf.

But it had found something.

It found a fault in Chubbs' air hose. It wasn't much of a fault: it wasn't even enough so Chubbs would know about it — until it was too late. Air had been leaking out, all right. But Chubbs had had enough air with or without the leak for hours. A slow leak didn't matter.

Except for the Ghost. The Ghost's pseudopod sensed the presence of air. It attacked itself now, sucker-like, to the damaged air-hose. From where I was, jetting furiously over toward Chubbs, I couldn't see the rip in the air-hose, but I didn't have to see it. The Ghost's action confirmed it. It did not have to be seen.

THE GHOST fastened its pseudopod there—and feasted on Chubbs' air. Using the near-vacuum of the interior of its body as opposed to the fifteen pounds per square inch inside Chubbs, it set up quite a suction.

Sucking all the air not only from Chubbs' air-tank, but from his lungs too. Chubbs' last scream was a dying wail of a sound and the Ghost seemed to know it was in the presence of death and would get no more oxygen from Chubbs. The pseudopod cut loose and merged again with the golden, force-net-outlined body. Chubbs hung there in space, unmoving. The skin of his face and hands was the color

of chalk. Chubbs was quite permanently dead.

I looked down the curving line of the Ghost's body. Morrell, all hunter now, had heard Chubbs' screams for help but must have figured I could handle the difficulty, whatever it was. Morrell was still methodically discharging his stunner at the Ghost. Lydia, though, must have seen what had happened, for she called over the intercom: "Pete! What happened to him? He — he's dead. Isn't he?"

I said he was dead. I said it was an accident. I said there must have been an imperfection in his air-hose, but even as I said it I knew it couldn't possibly be. I had checked out all the breathing devices three times. I couldn't have missed a hole, even a pin-prick, three times running.

"It was no accident," Lydia said.

She was quite close now. I looked at her. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Instead of answering me she turned around in space and used her stunner for locomotion, jetting toward her husband. He spoke suddenly over the intercom, and that surprised me. I thought he had been too wrapped up with the Ghost to know what was going on, let alone to hear his wife's words. He said: "Don't listen to her, Harrington." It was Harrington.

ton now. It wasn't Pete. Someone had died and it was the professional hunter's fault.

Like hell it was.

Because Chubbs had been murdered. I remembered how he had collided with Morrell when we had first come outside into deep space, remembered the brief flailing windmill of arms and legs. There had been time enough. The air-hose had been triple-checked. Chubbs had died because Morrell had poked a hole in his air-hose.

I looked at them, the man and his wife. Morrell was still blasting at the Ghost, almost as if Chubbs wasn't dead, almost as if nothing had happened which was not supposed to happen. And Lydia was jetting toward him, the stunner fanning out behind her like a wide-front beam of light. I didn't know what she was going to do, but I wasn't of a mind to wait and find out, not after what had happened to Chubbs. I used my own stunner to jet after Lydia.

Which meant only one of us was firing at the ensnared Ghost.

The Ghosts will never let you know they are fighting back mentally, suggestively, beating down your will with their will. That's half their strength: they're insidious. There is, of course, no reason to feel a suddenly consuming languor in deep space. The Ghost is responsible for the languor, but

it seems to come over you so naturally that no outside agent could possibly be responsible. At least, that's what you think at the time. And, following Lydia now, the strange torpor possessed me.

That's the first step, and it's an important one. Because then for the Ghost the battle is half won. If it can sink you into torpor, it almost has you

I drifted on toward Lydia, who had now reached her husband. I was only a few hundred yards off and floating dreamily and not caring about much. There was no great hurry, something seemed to tell me, something a part of myself. Relax, Harrington. What's the rush? What's the great hurry?

Then Lydia reached her husband. He was still firing his stunner at the golden surface of the Ghost and the surface was still shriveling, broiling, dying. But there was miles of it and it would take more than Morrell's single blaster to put the space-creature out of commission.

LYDIA climbed on Morrell's back. He knew she was there, all right. He floated in space and swatted one arm back at her ineffectually, almost indifferently. The Ghost-inspired languor had possessed him too. He had enough will-power left to continue firing his stunner, but not enough to

worry about the human peril behind him.

And I floated there, slowly, as in a dream, toward them.

Like her husband, Lydia had will power sufficient for one action. She used it to grab Morrell's air-hose between her hands and snap it in half.

Then she got clear of him. The Ghost's hungry caress replaced her. A pseudopod found Morrell's ruptured air-hose and even while he maintained his fire the air was drained from his lungs.

The Ghost feasted and Morrell died.

Rest, the Ghost said. Rest, I seemed to tell myself. Rest, weary ones. Rest is so peaceful, all is so calm, so tranquil, in changeless space. You have only to rest a little bit, a little while longer — and all will be over . . .

A little while, yes. A few hours and our spray-ons would dissolve.

I snapped out of it, temporarily. I shook my head savagely back and forth, trying to strain the neck muscles painfully. I struck myself repeatedly in the chest with my clenched fist. If I didn't snap out of it I would be a dead man, my will shattered, waiting peacefully for the end, waiting until my spray-on dissolved so the Ghost could feast on the oxygen inside of me.

"Lydia!" I said.

She didn't hear me. Her will had surrendered. She was floating quite contentedly alongside the corpse of her husband.

"Lydia!" I cried again. She looked at me once as I came close, smiling blankly. She would offer the Ghost no resistance. She wouldn't resist me either. I got hold of her and we both were weightless. I slung her weightless form under my arm and she grinned up at me, will-less.

Then I jetted back toward the *Ring Around*.

It was only two or three miles. It seemed more like a million light years. I must have shut off the stunner a hundred times along the way. Rest, the Ghost said. Rest, I told myself. So much strife, so much travail on the planetary worlds. Rest, rest, rest . . .

I floated there, Lydia still under my arm. I floated toward the golden gleaming, edge of the Ghost. It was waiting. It was in no great hurry. It couldn't hurt us now, not until the spray-ons dissolved. Then it wouldn't have to hurt us. Then we would explode into the vacuum of space with violent force. And, after not too many hours, the force net would dissolve too and the Ghost, eternal, serene, barely damaged by Morrell's stunner, would float on through space inside the ring nebula . . .

For a long time I floated there.

I was going to die if I remained much longer. I knew that someplace deep in my mind, knew it with my intellect, but will and instinct were pitted against it now, on the Ghost's side. The knowledge was there, but I did not act on the knowledge. The knowledge meant nothing, nothing

Then Lydia screamed hysterically. Once and once only, and it wasn't very loud. Over the intercom in the complete silence, the utter silence of deep space, it was shattering. I could almost feel the Ghost's control slip away for a split-second, then slip back.

I jetted toward the *Ring Around*, still carrying Lydia.

The Ghost was there, filling all of space. And filling the vacuum where my will had been as well. Stop, Harrington. Stop. Stopstop-stopstopstop

I WAS sweating inside the spray-on. It was a cold sweat and it had no place to evaporate. It stung in my eyes so that I could barely see through them. I bumped against something, bumped it and remained there, unmoving, for a long time.

It was the hull of the *Ring Around*. I looked up slowly. I wasn't ten feet from the airlock but it was the hardest journey I ever made. It must have taken two hours and absolutely no physi-

cal activity at all, but I was thoroughly exhausted by the time I entered the airlock with Lydia. I had never been closer to death in my life, and I have had some narrow escapes

Well, that's the story, except for Lydia.

I had expected Lydia would be insane. I've seen it happen to people. But Lydia wasn't people. Lydia was something special all right.

Inside the *Ring Around*, I got the rockets going and peeled off my own spray-on and Lydia's. She was unconscious for a few minutes and I waited there alongside her until she came around. The first thing she said was:

"I had to kill him, Pete. You know I had to."

I didn't say anything.

"Listen to me, Pete. It wasn't because I loved Chubbs. I didn't love him. Chubbs meant nothing to me. But Chubbs knew how to enjoy himself and Pete?"

"What do you want?" I said.

"Are you taking me back to Ring City to turn me in, Pete?"

I said that I was.

She looked at me. She was very beautiful and she knew it and she didn't have to look twice to know that I knew it too. "You don't have to, Pete. I had to kill him, you see. He knew. He had seen me with Chubbs. It couldn't possibly be the same after that. He would

want to possess me, like some property he owned. Pete?"

I just looked at her.

"Pete. Kiss me, Pete."

I slapped her. I slapped her hard and she fell back against the bulkhead. I had to do it. It was like slapping myself. After that, I would be all right. I could look at her and it wouldn't mean much.

For there is beauty in the galaxy. A woman is beautiful, even an evil woman. But so is a crystalized Ghost, and we had lost our Ghost. For Morrell it had been the final quarry and he had died seeking it. Or perhaps he had died be-

cause he had been mistaken. The Ring Nebula Ghost was not the final quarry. It never could be.

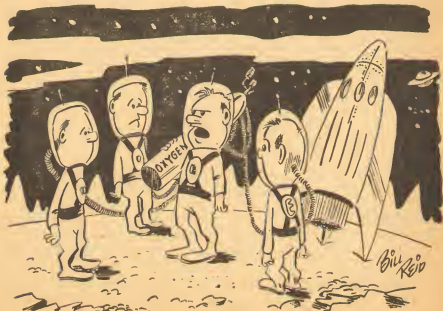
I looked at Lydia. Her beauty meant nothing now. I smiled. The smile said she could no longer touch me.

Morrell had killed and had been killed because he had not been able to conquer himself. Lydia had killed for the same reason.

I smiled at her again and she fled to her own cabin. She knew she had lost.

I had met and conquered the final quarry.

Myself.



" . . . and one thing above all . . . Keep close to me!"

Zan Fanton was probably the most famous criminologist to visit Earth. The fact that he came from Mars explained his eye for women in—

The Case Of The Stripped Blonde

by

Ivar Jorgensen

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

ACTING as assistant to Zan Fanton is a great honor. He elected me out of all the Criminology students at North American University. Others were far more brilliant. Fifty per cent of them had better scholastic records. But Zan Fanton, who selects a new assistant each year, chose me after his usual January interviews. I immediately became the envy of every student in the university and they all reconciled themselves to trying again next year.

Zan Fanton is a Martian. A slim, dark man, he is said to have been born of a Martian warlord and a female captive taken in a slave raid before Emancipation was declared on the red planet. Zan has never affirmed nor denied this and I've never considered it judicious to ask him.

He is probably the greatest criminologist alive and, as is often true with such geniuses, never went to school a day in his life.

He solved his first case at the age of fifteen when he picked the assassin of the Martian Emperor, Fad Rantoc from a group of fifty men by asking only nine questions.

Zan Fanton's enemies claim to this day that he picked the wrong man but that is not true. The man later confessed and Zan Fanton was given his freedom for solving the murder. He wrote several books on the art of detection before he was twenty-one years old (Terran span) and entered active practice as a criminologist at a very early age.

Zan's headquarters is in Minneapolis because, transportation-wise, this city is the center of the solar system. His cases have ranged from Uranus to Mercury. He ap-



prehended Cortan, the infamous "mind murderer" of Ganymede who could—under the right conditions—kill at a distance of twenty miles by the application of sheer mental force. He tracked down every member of the terrible Assassins Limited, who were responsible for twenty remote-control murders all over the system.

His successes have been too numerous to count but he has also had his failures. He was unable to solve the Asteroid Murder in which Thomas Wynant was found, dead but still warm, manacled to an asteroid. His throat had been cut. The mystery was involved in the fact that the manacles holding him had obviously not been disturbed for hundreds of years. I am eagerly looking forward to the solution. If Zan ever finds it.

The Case of the stripped blonde, however, was on an entirely different nature. It illustrates how much more difficult is the job of a criminal investigator today than in past centuries. How a criminologist must ever alert to new scientific discoveries and inventions. As Zan Fanton says, "Scientific advancement aids mankind. It also aids the criminal." For instance, teleportation made it possible for a doctor to receive needed drugs almost instantly. It also made it possible for a criminal to teleport cur-

rency out of a bank vault until Zan Fanton uncovered such a plot and defenses were set up against the practice. That one incidentally, I call the Case of the Teleported Brunette and sometime I may put it on tape.

THE CASE of the Stripped Blonde started in Zan's office one morning when an extremely agitated man burst in and demanded Zan's services.

"They come very high," Zan said politely.

"I am willing to pay anything, but you've got to save Lorry from demolition!"

"Who is Lorry?"

"My Ward!"

"Then I suppose the next logical question is—who are you?"

The man seemed to grow suddenly weary. He dropped into a chair and wiped perspiration from his face with a feathery plastic handkerchief. "My name is Kenneth Whaley," he said, "and I'm at my wit's end."

He was middle-aged and had what might have been termed a very sincere face. His frail shoulders drooped as he said, "I promised Lorry's parents I would take care of her. They both died after a rocket accident on the New York Spaceway. They implored me on their death-beds and I gave my

solemn word. Now—" he shrugged in utter helplessness.

Zan's keen cat's-eyes were regarding the man with compassion. So was I. Zan said, "Perhaps you'd better compose yourself and tell me all about it."

Whaley smiled weakly. "I suppose I do seem rather hysterical, but I love Lorry as I would my own daughter. You *must* help her."

"Then I must have information."

"Lorry is accused of murdering Mark Haber."

"Who is Mark Haber?"

"A family friend. They have known each other since childhood."

"Is she guilty?"

"Guilty—?"

"*Did* she murder Mark Haber?"

"I—yes—no—I—of course not!"

"You seem doubtful. Were there any witnesses?"

"Yes. But they're all lying. The janitor, the cleaning woman, Haber's housekeeper. They're all lying I tell you!"

"I see. A conspiracy of some sort aimed at the demolition of your ward."

"Yes, because Lorry couldn't kill anyone. She's kind and gentle."

I broke in at this point. "Mr. Whaley, suppose you give Mr. Fanton more precise details. No doubt your ward is a very fine young lady, but—"

Zan held up a hand. "I'm afraid Mr. Whaley is too upset to present the facts clearly. If you'll just tell us where the murder victim resided I'll look into the case and we will contact you later."

"Then you will save Lorry?" Whaley asked eagerly.

"I can make no promises. If your ward committed murder, your only hope is a good criminal lawyer. If it was premeditated I am afraid—"

"Help her—please, Mr. Fanton."

"I suggest you go home and get some rest. You'll hear from me I promise you."

Whaley got up to leave. As he opened the door, Fanton called, "Mr. Whaley, your face looks familiar. Have we ever met before?" Fanton was fingering the calling card Whaley had dropped on the desk. It said only, *Kenneth Whaley*, and gave an address and video-phone number.

Whaley turned his wan face toward us. "I think not. I've heard of you of course."

"What type of business are you in?"

"I import fine skins from the outer planets."

Zan's eyebrows went up. "Oh, yes. How stupid of me. I saw you last year at the New York Furrrier's exhibit. You won first prize for the finest Ganymedian keba

pelt."

Whaley's eyes brightened despite his grief. "Yes," he said shyly. "It was an excellent specimen."

AFTER WHALEY left I expected Zan to flare into action. But he sat staring dreamy-eyed at the ceiling. I was about to suggest that we get on with it when he said, "The Ganymedian keba, Dean—" Dean Spencer is my name in case I haven't previously mentioned it and I don't think I have—"is a remarkable animal indeed."

"But—"

"Completely hairless, it lives comfortably in a temperature of seventy degrees below our zero; during the Ganymedian summer that is—"

"But Zan—" There is no formality between us as you have no doubt gathered. "—don't you think—?"

"In summer that is. The Ganymedian winter is too cold to record accurately, but the keba goes its merry way without even the mildest frost-bite."

"But is this the time to discuss kebas?"

"If you are to become a great criminologist like your teacher you must take your information where you find it."

And now you are aware that

modesty is not one of Zan Fanton's virtues. "But", I protested, "is it wise to fill one's head with a lot of useless trivial —?"

"There is no such thing as useless trivia, my boy. Did you know that on Pluto a certain species of ground hog refuses to stand exposed to the winds on that bleak planet?"

I shrugged. "So it goes in a hole or behind a rock."

"Oh, no. They don't seem to have intelligence enough for that. They go behind each other."

"I don't understand."

"Nor does anyone else but the fact remains. They travel in pairs. Mr. puts Mrs. between himself and the wind. Whereupon, Mrs. steps around Mr. and uses him for a shelter. Immediately, Mr. grunts nastily and circles Mrs. until the wind no longer hits him. Then —" Zan raised his hands in a helpless gesture.

"They just keep it up?"

"*Ad infinitum*. A pair of those groundhogs have been known to circle the planet in that matter.

I was sure he was pulling my leg but I couldn't prove it. I'd never been to Pluto. I frowned angrily, "All right. So Plutonian groundhogs are stupid. What possible use is the information to me?"

"Some day, my boy, you might save a man's life by knowing about

Plutonian groundhogs. A case might hinge on that point."

"But not this one," I retorted angrily.

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Then don't you think we'd better find some points it *does* hinge on?"

He sighed. "Ah, the impetuosity of youth! Very well, we'll earn our money by action. I fear we won't be able to earn it by results produced."

"Then you think she's guilty?"

"How do I know? I will say this however. All the facts in our hands point to her guilt."

"Well, I think she's innocent. I trust Whaley's obvious faith in her."

"Then you're probably in for disillusionment but it will no doubt do you good. It will make a cynic of you. Only cynics excell as criminologists."

I stepped to the coat rack and opened the door. "Your hat, sir." He accepted it with all the delicate courtesy of a true Martian dandy.

MARK HABER, before his violent demise, had lived in a luxurious two-room apartment on Lunar Drive. And we had not been there more than ten minutes when I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Lorry Davis was abysmally guilty. There were no two

ways about it.

She had stepped from a cab in full view of the uniformed doorman who knew her well. He had touched his hat, said, "Good afternoon, Miss Davis," and opened the door.

Lorry Davis said, "Good afternoon, John," and entered the building. She took the escalator to the fourth level. In the corridor, she met Jenny, the cleaning woman, at work on the walls with a disinfectant raygun. Jenny said, "Good afternoon, Miss Davis."

Lorry made no reply, which struck Jenny as odd because Lorry had always been very cordial with underlings. In fact, Lorry usually handed Jenny a tip knowing that the poor woman had had to prove destitution in order to get a job a robot could have handled more cheaply. But she neither spoke nor tipped, indicating she was under intense emotional strain.

She rang the bell and the door was opened by Haber's household robot. It motioned to take her gloves and bag but she refused to part with them.

This incident was witnessed by Haber's housekeeper, Maude, who lived out and came only during certain daylight hours. Maude was in the living room when Lorry entered. Maude said, "Good afternoon, Miss Davis."

"Lorry asked, "Is Mark at home?"

Maude was surprised that Lorry did not return her greeting and charged it to emotional strain. This last was obvious as the girl's face was tense. Maude said, "Of course. He always takes a nap at this time of day. I'll call him."

As Maude turned toward the bedroom, Lorry said. "I wish to see him."

This surprised Maude as she was already in the process of calling him. Haber awoke and was quite surprised to learn Lorry was waiting for him in the living room. He got up and hurried out to greet her.

As soon as he appeared, Lorry took a gun from her purse and shot Haber twice through the heart.

These facts were gathered after interviews with all the witnesses and the detective from Homicide who was handling the case. The name of the latter was Sam Peters. He and Zan were not unknown to each other, and Peters had little love for the dandified Martian criminologist. Zan regarded Peters with tolerant amusement; an amusement I privately felt was uncalled-for because Peters was a conscientious, capable officer.

Peters asked, "Are you planning to take the Davis girl's case?"

Zan had remarkable aplomb in

such situations. "I was considering it," he said negligently.

"Fine," Peters returned. "All you have to do is prove that three witnesses are either blind or in a conspiracy to have the girl demolished. Also that the gun was not one of her possessions."

Zan showed interest. "The gun? Have you established its ownership?"

"We have. Miss Davis bought it six months ago. She has a permit to carry it—God knows why. Because she's sick I suppose."

"Hmmm. Then it does look as though she's guilty, doesn't it, Peters?"

"It does."

"Thanks", said Zan and turned as though to leave the station. "Aren't you going to talk to her?" Peters asked.

"Why should I?"

"Well—since you're looking into the case, I'd think you'd want to know what she has to say."

ZAN'S cat-eyes had a way of dancing and appearing lazily amused at the same time. "But if the girl is guilty it doesn't matter much *what* she says, does it?"

"No—no, I guess not."

Zan turned suddenly. "Why don't you tell me what she told you. It would save time and spare me the depressing trip into your inner

jail."

Peters flared, "Now what's wrong with our jail? It's the most modern—"

"The girl's story, Peters?"

"Well, there wasn't much to it. She swore that she was with her guardian during the time in question—closeted with him over the discussion of some business affairs."

"That should be easy enough to refute. If she was really in Haber's apartment busy with killing the man, then Kenneth Whaley certainly would not take an oath that she was with him."

"He certainly would. And he did."

Zan reacted with annoyance. "Oh, of course. As a gentleman he would not hesitate to purjure himself under such circumstances."

"I think that's pretty evident."

"But his testimony wouldn't go far with a jury toward saving Lorry Davis."

"Any jury would ignore it."

Zan sighed. "Then it would appear that our beautiful young heiress is doomed, wouldn't it?"

With that, Zan turned and made a graceful exit, leaving Peters bewildered. I followed Zan out. On the sidewalk, he turned and raised an appreciative eye to the facade of the police station. "Beautiful building, isn't it?"

Zan could be annoying at times. "What has that got to do with the business at hand?"

"My boy, you must learn to pause along the way of life and admire beauty where you find it. You might not pass this way again."

"I expect to pass this way many times. Now let's get in touch with Whaley and tell him the case is hopeless. You owe him that much."

I don't think Zan heard me. "And Lorry Davis is very beautiful too. What a tragedy that such perfection should be rayed into a tiny blackened cinder."

"Zan, really—"

"Would you like to know how very beautiful? Come with me. I'll show you."

My protests got me nowhere. I was hauled into a cab and hauled out again on the steps of the Gavin Museum. I was hauled inside and finally to the vicinity of a shining marble statue on a gold-plated pedestal. The figure was that of a graceful nude girl.

"Lorry Davis," Zan said with what sounded like reverence. "She posed for it. Or rather, went through the torture of having her entire body put into casts in order to create the moulds that went to form the final statue."

"It's very beautiful, but—"

"The process is not new, but is

rarely used."

It was a beautiful figure and I became distracted from my main theme while contemplating it. "How did you know Lorry Davis posed for this statue?"

"Just some of the useless trivia I gather here and there."

"If you mean that as a jibe, I still maintain it *is* useless."

Zan turned regretfully from the statue and we walked from the museum. "You're going to contact Whaley and tell him the bad news?" I asked.

He was slow in answering. We stopped to hail a cab and while it was making a U-turn, he said, "My boy, being the finest criminologist alive is a little like being God."

I was shaken at such blasphemy but before I could voice my protest, he went on. "Now this Lorry Davis for instance. We hold her destiny in our hands. If we make no move—leave things as they are—she is doomed. But if we were able to prove her innocent—I said *if*—then her destiny would be changed. In essence we would be the creators of new life by causing the old one to be maintained. Isn't that Godlike?"

WE GOT into the cab and I figuratively threw up my hands. "Zan, I don't understand you. I'm wasting your time study-

ing under you. I'll never learn a thing from you because I spend all my time being confused. I'll go back to school and you pick up another assistant."

"Patience, my boy. All things take a little while."

I slumped back discouraged. But if he could take it, so could I. "Where to, master?"

Zan's eyes were now just plain dreamy. Not dancing. "Home, I think. Yes, a little rest is in order." He gave the driver the address and toyed with his elegant little mustache. He said, "The original must be exquisite."

"The original of that statue? The girl herself? Lorry Davis?"

"No doubt but I'm afraid we'll have to be content with seeing the statue."

"Not necessarily."

"What do you mean?"

"What would I mean? If one wishes to see a girl in the nude, what is the first step? One must remove her clothing, mustn't one?"

"It so happens that this one is behind bars—under lock and key."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Did you see her behind bars? Under lock and key?"

"Of course not, but Peters said—"

"What Peters said is not important. You must learn to be sure

of only what you see with your own eyes, my boy. If you take people's assurance for things you'll soon end up in a pocket."

"Then you don't think Lorry Peters is really in jail?"

"I didn't see her there."

Zan's implication amazed me. "Then you believe Peters is involved in some kind of criminal conspiracy? That's impossible, and I don't believe it."

"There you go," Zan said, smugly. "Putting words in my mouth. Now you've turned Peters into a criminal."

I was hurt. "Zan, are you ridiculing me? Treating me like a child? If you have no more respect than that for me—"

"Why, I fairly ooze respect for you, my boy."

"Then what's all this nonsense leading to?"

"It's quite simple. I have a great yearning to see Lorry Peters in the nude. I'd simply love to remove her clothing. There remains only the matter of opportunity."

"Zan—you're mad!"

He leered at me. "No, merely lustful. A condition males often find themselves in."

We had arrived at Zan's apartment and I was now seated stiffly on one of his chairs in a position of erect defiance. "Are you ac-

tually—would you actually seduce that girl if you had the opportunity?"

"Oh, nothing as vulgar as that—I don't think I would at least. But of course,—one can never tell."

I was speechless. While I groped for words of protest, Zan went on. "Let's look at it honestly. Here is a girl guilty of murder, Right?"

"Right," I agreed reluctantly. That at least was certainly true.

"Then would you consider her in a position to prefer charges against a pair of—well, lovers of beauty? And so long as that beautiful body will soon be a small black cinder, what harm is there in feasting our eyes on it?"

"Zan!" I shouted. "You're talking rot. Frankly, I'm beginning to wonder about your sanity. In the first place she's in jail and you'll never get an opportunity to—"

"Let's find out." Zan extracted Whaley's card from his pocket and went to the videophone. He dialed. We watched the screen. It brightened, then revealed Whaley standing in the middle of his own living room.

Zan clucked sadly. "My, my. He forgot to turn his key off."

But I was staring pop-eyed at the other occupant of the room. Lorry Davis. She was beautiful all right; standing there dressed for the street in a stunning, form-fitting black

coat.

"Why, she isn't in jail at all?" I croaked. "Zan—how did you know?"

But Zan had snapped the connection and stood there leering, a truly lustful light in his cat-eyes. "He'll think it was a wrong number— I hope. Come on!"

"What are we going to do?"

"I'm going to see that girl in the nude if I'm demolished for it!"

THE NEXT episode will always stand out in my mind as a nightmare. We went to Whaley's apartment. At the door, Zan was actually panting. He had a skeleton key poised for use when he knocked on the door panel. Probably he did not expect Whaley to open up.

But Whaley did just that. Zan brushed by him and I followed. Zan snapped, "Hold him!" pointing at Whaley, and I then discovered how completely I was dedicated to the strange Martian because even in my horror I obeyed.

Holding the frail little Whaley with his arms pinioned was a simple task and I had plenty of time to observe Zan Fanton's procedure. It was abrupt and direct.

He advanced on Lorry Davis and began undressing her.

The girl was so completely startled that for a few moments she was

unable to resist. Zan had her coat off and her skirt jerked up over her shoulders before she gave out with even a scream. The scream was muffled because now her blouse was coming off over her head. Zan flung it aside and went to work on her slip.

That took but a moment and Lorry was standing there in the filmiest of panties and the scantiest of bras. Whaley, red-faced and speechless was struggling against my grip but I scarcely noticed him. My eyes were riveted upon the gorgeousness of the almost nude Lorry Davis. After all, I *am* human.

But I'm also a civilized Terran and I yanked my eyes away when the feeling of guilt came. I turned them on Zan. He had obviously come to his senses. His hands had been on Lorry's stunning torso, but now he stepped back, his face flaming, his expression one of complete confusion. "I'm—I'm very sorry," he mumbled.

"Have you gone mad?" Whaley cried, still struggling.

Zan took out a handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "I'm afraid I did for a moment." He noticed I was still holding Whaley. "Let him go."

I released Whaley and he rushed to Lorry's side. Zan had already handed the poor girl her slip and other garments. She stood there

holding them with tears running down her face and a look of hurt accusation that must have cut even the lustful Martian to the quick.

Zan raised his hands helplessly. "What can I say? What can I do?"

"Just—just get out," Lorry sobbed.

Whaley restrained himself admirably. He was clumsily helping Lorry on with her clothing when she turned suddenly and ran from the room. He turned frigid eyes on Zan. "I suppose you have an explanation for this attack?"

"I'm afraid not," Zan said. "What is she doing here, anyhow? I thought she was in jail."

It was my turn for confusion. I stared at Zan. He had assured me that he had *not* thought her to be in jail. Whaley said, "It was a matter of special consideration. I had documents here for her to inspect—too bulky to be taken conveniently to the jail. Also there was more privacy here and the police allowed her to visit me."

"Without a guard?"

"There are two men in the street and my video key is open."

I thought Whaley would immediately call the two guards from the street to arrest us. But when Zan said, "I suppose we'd better be going," Whaley did not object. His hostile eyes followed us out the door.

Back in the street I could not refrain from saying, "Well, did you have fun?"

But Zan's embarrassment had vanished. He looked brightly at the window of Whaley's apartment as he pulled me into a doorway across the street. "She'll be leaving soon," he said.

"Good lord, man! Haven't you had enough? Are you planning to attack her in the street and undress her again?"

"That would be impossible. There will be the police guards."

I couldn't figure the Martian out. He made no sense to me. But he evidently made sense to himself because after the guards had taken Lorry Davis away, back to the jail, he grabbed my arm and dragged me after him back across the street.

He said, "Whaley knows I'm on to him. He'll work fast and try to get out of there. Come on!"

And it was like a replay of the same old record. We went up to Whaley's apartment. This time Zan used the key and flung the door open. We rushed in. Zan said, "Hold him."

But I missed my cue and when Whaley charged him, Zan knocked the man cold with a straight right. The reason I missed my cue was because I stood there doubting my own sanity. I'd seen the guards

take Lorry Davis away. But here she was again; the same coat, the same dress, the same breathtaking beauty.

And again Zan went lustfully to work on her. He stripped her naked. But with far different results, this time; results that made me gasp.

She was only half a beauty. The face, bust, and legs were painfully exquisite and seductive. But her middle—from the thighs up, from just under the breasts down—consisted of ugly steel braces, bolts and ingenious wheels.

Zan was fiercely jubilant. "An android!" he cried. "A perfect blending of android and robot! An absolute masterpiece!"

I stared at the naked figure. Whaley got groggily to his feet and dived again at Zan. The martian casually knocked him out again with another straight right. Whaley went down again. Zan looked at me and grinned. He said, "Close your mouth, son. The case is over. Dial headquarters on that set and tell them to come and take over."

I SAT quietly in Zan's apartment while the little Martian detective strutted and spread himself. "Do you see now?" he asked "Why a good detective feels like God sometimes. Giving back a life is almost like creating a new one."

"How did you know? How on earth did you do it?"

"It was one of those cases you approach in reverse. You start with instinct. Instinct told me the girl wasn't guilty. The thing was too perfect."

"I could have assumed that too but it wouldn't have done her much good."

"From that point it was a matter of ascending logic. If she was not guilty she was not in Haber's apartment when the murder occurred. Assuming that, two progression paths were open. The witnesses were in conspiracy or they had been fooled. I dismissed the conspiracy angle knowing a clever murderer would not consider trusting so many people as being safe. So they were sincere but deceived.

"That meant *someone* or *something* else had pulled the trigger. And again you have two progression paths. *Someone* meant an exact double—a twin or a chance person the killer had found. I dismissed that as being against all percentages."

He stopped for breath but I was impatient. "So—?"

"So that left *something*. A robot obviously."

"But who could surmise a robot at that point? Androids are not perfected yet and no robot could be made to look like a beau-

tiful girl."

He grinned. "That's where the 'useless trivia' comes in. Whaley was familiar with keba hides and if a robot *could* be camouflaged to successfully impersonate a beautiful girl, the skin of the keba would be the logical material to use."

"But to recreate with such perfection. No sculpture could—" I paused. "Wait a minute!"

"Of course! Now your superb mind is functioning. Whaley would have access to the moulds from Lorry Davis' statue."

I allowed my frank admiration to show. "So you knew it was an android-robot all the time."

"Let us say I hoped it was."

"But robots can't carry on conversations. This one talked to the witnesses."

"Ah, that was Whaley's stroke of genius. He cased the job with infinite patience. He knew the robot would meet the doorman and he knew what the doorman would say. He recorded the man's voice previously and set the robot to respond with a previously recorded answer to that particular wavelength. You know of course the wave-length of no two voices are alike?"

"Yes. At least I know that much."

"The tip-off lay in the fact that

the robot did not respond to the greeting of the cleaning woman."

I followed him on that one. "Because Whaley did not anticipate her presence in the corridor."

"Exactly. The robot's next response after speaking to the doorman was keyed to the housekeeper's voice. Whaley knew she would be there."

"You picked Whaley as the killer because of the obviously phony alibi?"

"Not phony. She was do doubt with Whaley when the murder occurred. Rather, an alibi that would not be taken seriously; one attributed to his loyalty. Lorry of course knew it was true but no one else would have believed it."

"There's one more thing—why did Whaley call you in?"

"For two reasons. Conceit was one. He was sure I would throw up my hands and walk away from his perfect murder. Also, he wanted to demonstrate his desire to help Lorry. His motive was no doubt financial. We'll certainly find he has embezzled the girl's money. Maybe he was afraid she planned to marry Haber. Then perhaps he conceived the plan to get rid of both of them. That done, his accounting to the courts would have been accepted because there would have been no one with the facts necessary to reveal him."

My mind wandered. I said, "She certainly was beautiful. Standing there in her—I wonder if there might be a chance for me?"

Zan frowned. "You must learn that women are basically nuisances. They distract a man from his work."

I had one complaint. "Zan, why did you fool me with all that lustful nonsense? Why didn't you reveal the case to me step-by-step?"

He smiled. "Dramatic effect perhaps. Also, a good detective would have been right there with me all the time. Asking himself the same questions I ask myself."

"Then let's face it. I'm not a good detective. I'll bow out and you select another assistant."

"What makes you think I want

a detective for an assistant?"

"But I—you select a new one each year. You—"

"And I've finally found what I've been looking for. A biographer. You shall write about me, my boy. Give all the worlds the pleasure of following my cases. Such genius as mine should have wider recognition."

"You mean—?"

"Of course." He sat down and leaned forward tensely. His cat-eyes danced. "Now there was a case on Venus two years ago. You must write it up. We can call it, The Affair of the Virgin With Three Sons. I'll tell you about it."

"Yes, Zan." I spoke very humbly. "Tell me about it."

THE END



Automation



IT is not necessary to be very much of a seer or prophet to detect the rapid encroachment of the art called "automation" on the American scene. As manufactured objects take more and more standardized forms, special-purpose machines are appearing to make them. In one sense, the future is here. Automation is not some distant robotic utopia.

While no two persons will agree exactly on a technical definition of automation, the current idea is that the word expresses all of the techniques that disassociate human labor and thought from an industrial

process or a manufacturing process. The science-fictionists who predicted the world of the future weren't optimist enough!

For thirty years automatic machine tools have spat out parts at a fabulous rate and few thought of the consequences—but this was rudimentary automation.

Factories have been built which construct automobile frames and hot water tanks with hardly human interference. Chemical plants operate with a token force of people.

Now this technique is spreading everywhere even into white collar

clerical work where gigantic IBM machines perform all but the most sophisticated of computing and collating operations. So, automation is here.

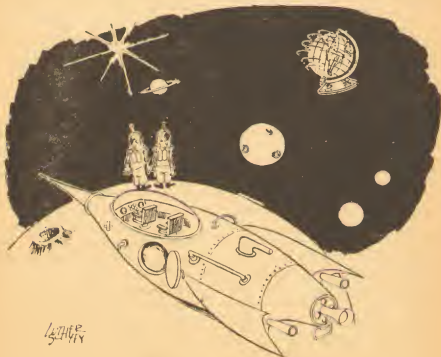
American industry has shown the world how to apply science so that the "good things of this world" are available to everybody—because of automation. And this is but a beginning.

Within twenty years, it is predicted that the work week will be no more than thirty hours—and perhaps less, so fantastically is our

productivity climbing.

If you want to see the pattern of the future, if you want to peek in the crystal ball of decades hence, visit one of the newer factories, and marvel at the machines. That is the pattern.

Some philosophers think this may not be an unmitigated blessing—"what will people do?" they ask. That doesn't require much of an answer. Every person will be able to contribute his tithe of work, while he develops his every interest and faculty—that is the future!



"It always spins on its axis like that.
Didn't you learn anything in college?"

In a world of tensions there's always a danger of blowup; problem is to ease the cause of discord — not hide it. Witness the chaos of —

NO CAUSE FOR ALARM

by

Dick Purcell

AFTER THE THREAT and the danger had been clearly presented and understood, the obvious question was asked: "What are we going to tell the people?"

Appropriately, it was asked by John Kramer, Chief of Public Welfare, even though he knew the answer before he spoke. "Panic must be averted at all costs." This from stern-faced Lawrence Pike, Chief of LBMHACA. These letters stood for Liason Between Military Heads And Civil Authority, but few people knew this nor cared. In an age of government-by-bureau, or "government by alphabet" as the night club comics called it, no one could possibly keep abreast of the translations. A serious attempt in this direction would have been fruitless because the titles changed so rapidly, were revised and transformed as bureau swal-

lowed bureau and the wedding of bureaus gave birth to new ones under the tongue-in-cheek guise of "economy."

"By that you mean, of course," Kramer said, "that the public must not be appraised of the grave situation facing us."

Lawrence Pike's shrug was duplicated by the chiefs of seven other bureaus. Pike said, "What else?"

"After all," a man named Kennedy said virtuously, "we can't say for certain that the country *will* be destroyed."

Other contributions to the discussion were rapidly added: "The cold war has stayed cold for a long time."

"Crises have come and gone."

"We have it on solid information that the East is definitely afraid of us."

Kramer held up his hand. "I'm

not standing against you, gentlemen. I'm merely seeking information upon which to base the actions of my department."

"There is only one answer. Everything must be labeled *Top Secret*."

"But if and when the bombs start falling —?"

Mitchell, Head of Co-ordination, leaned forward. His tone was a mixture of kindness and condescension. "When you've been with us a while, old man, you'll understand that each of us moves in a straight line. There is no room for compromise in government service. You make as your watchword—*reassurance at all times*. You have your structure to work with. The protection of public information sources has been looked to with the same foresight and care as the protection of the lives of our people because one interlocks with the other."

"I see," Kramer said gravely.

Mitchell smiled distantly, "So you go ahead and do your job straight down the line and you'll find others coordinating on the higher levels for the common good."

I wonder what he's talking about? Kramer asked himself. But then the meeting was breaking up and he didn't have time to request clarification.

It was not really needed, how-

even. Each man had his job and did it, and Kramer hurried away to do his. But with an inner uneasiness he could not quite define.

As he rode back to his office; the uneasiness increased. From whence, he wondered, had come this giant conspiracy against the people? He caught at this thought guiltily and strove to stifle it. If a conspiracy, it was certainly a benign one. A censorship of the people's choice because they elected the men who appointed the men who set up the rules and laid out the program for the men who—

Kramer smiled. It wasn't like that at all really. It had begun a long time ago when government got to be too big a thing to be handled by elected officials; when atomic secrets *had* to be hidden from the enemy. Then motivations and actions that hinged upon the secrets had to be hidden also. Until —

"Oh, hell!" Kramer muttered petulantly, and strode into his office to set the "security ball" rolling. He had many able assistants and the work went smoothly. Carefully worded releases were put upon the monitors to be broadcast at regular intervals.

The secondary releases, formulated to follow any actual attack were put on wire and spooled on to other monitors that would go smoothly into action if the need

arose. Also, the emergency releases, carefully written, numbered for timing, carefully checked beforehand for effectiveness.

Kramer listened to snatches of the security structure as it had been laid out. "Ladies and gentlemen, reports received from the northern radar outposts indicate exploratory activity of unidentified aerial patrols. There is no cause for alarm however, because hostile intent has not been definitely indicated. Also, word from the Secret Security Arm in unfriendly territory gives hint of definite fear and insecurity among those who would logically be most expected to —"

The firm, authoritative voice lulled Kramer's uneasiness. Nerves. Tension. The price of being too close to the source. The people were right in demanding security from every tremor and rumor that swept the troubled world. Nothing was going to happen . . .

THE FIRST bomb fell twenty minutes later.

Shock immobilized Kramer. He turned and stared with glazed eyes at the fire and fury beyond his window. But even though he could not move, his mind went on working. As half a city vanished in agonized panorama, he knew the bomb had been a near-miss; that the center of its destruction lay

three hundred miles west. He got stiffly to his feet. And just as the automatically timed public advices were streaming out over the monitors, the thought went dully through his mind.

This is it.

As he moved automatically to seek shelter, other sureties drifted through his dulled consciousness. Our bombers would already have screamed skyward from a hundred outposts. Perhaps destruction similar to this was already spreading crimson across the face of the East. Perhaps —

But now the time of orderly thinking was past. Another explosion smashed about him. Kramer was cringing in terror, then crawling over the rubble of a once-proud building, scrabbling animal-like across the mangled bodies of the once-complacent people.

And something more was in his mind; that this was world-suicide, much bigger than the most daring mind had previously conceived; that none would survive; that none *could* survive; that even now they were all gone and he alone survived but momentarily through some freak chance of fate.

No executive now — no dignified head of government — he ran blindly toward the mirage of safety; a place he knew deep in the earth.

"The protection of public infor-

mation sources has been looked to with the same foresight and care as the protection of the lives of our people—"

A place he knew. He sought it in panic.

And found it.

He crawled through the rubble on his hands and knees, down into the bowels of the earth until the walls around him were cool and solid. A hidden and secret room.

He took but one deep breath. Then new thunder rocked him to the floor. But the thunder did not

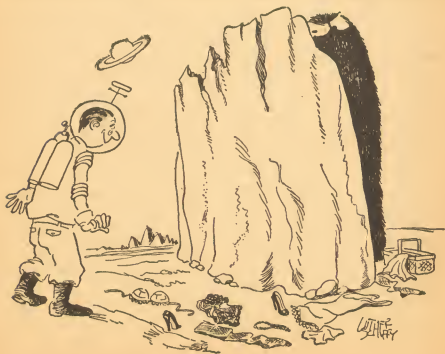
still a voice that came to his ears; a voice he heard clearly as the thunder left his head:

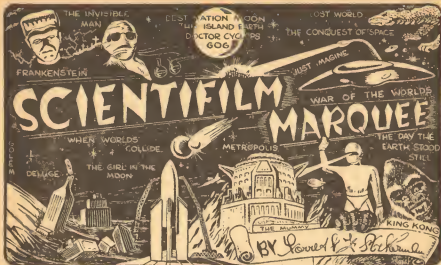
"Your leaders ask that you be calm, ladies and gentlemen. Please be assured that there is no cause for alarm—"

The needle on the contrivance stuck.

"—no cause for alarm—no cause for alarm—no cause for alarm—"

Suddenly Kramer turned from the animal; stood erect like a human being. Laughed before he died.





UNIVERSAL-INTERPLANE-TARY or perhaps simply all-inclusive *Scientifilm Studios* will be the new name, or at least nickname, of Universal-International Studios if it keeps up its terrific pace. It is now the undisputed leader in the sci-fi race. *Tarantula* caused such an avalanche at the box office that U-I is immediately reading *The Deadly Mantis*. **THIS ISLAND EARTH** had racked up 8 million simoleons at last report, and *The Creature Walks Among Us* any moment. A subterranean civilization will be pictured in same studio's *The Mole Men*, and the dinosauria crawl again in *The Land Unknown*. Richard Matheson has completed the cinemadaptation of his own Gold Medal novel, "The Shrinking Man", to be known on the silver screen as *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Dan O'Herlihy, the incredible Robinson

Crusoe from Ireland, has been named for the featured role. Matheson is reportedly very happy with the amount of original material they let him retain in his screenplay. At time of writing he is hoping to interest U-I in reviving its property "Conjure Wife," the outstanding *Unknown* novel by Fritz Leiber which it threw away some years ago under the title *Witch Woman*. Matheson would like to give it the job it deserves. Should studio feel, however, once was enough, his attention might be diverted to Jack Williamson's masterpiece along somewhat the same lines (and from the same late lamented fantasy magazine), "Darker Than You Think". This literate lycanthropy yarn would be a natural for Dick to adapt.

Still prowling the Universal production charts, we find a wierdie identified as sci-fi and mysterious-

ly titled *Monleith*; no further info available at time column goes to press. But from the author himself, Charlie Beaumont, I have the inside word on *The Man Who Could Not Die*, an original screen treatment that he's prepared to order, about an invulnerable, immortal man! Plenty of fireworks in this one. On the lighter side, *Francis in the Haunted House* will continue the talking mule series.

Creature from Green Hell, not to be confused with Blackie LaGoon, the Bud Westmore money-making monster of amphibious origin is a creation of Al Zimbalist, who has been consulting with Paul (the Beast of Science Fiction) Blaisdell on appearance and construction of this particular pet. Whatever it turns out to look like, the explanation for its mutation will be a bombardment of cosmic rays as a result of taking a ride in a rocket in a high-altitude experiment. I told them scientists not to monkey around the ion curtain!

Gore (Messiah) Vidal's ultra successful teleshow, "Visit to a Small Planet", will get a big Broadway stageplay treatment. Could be it and Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" (the former with Cyril Ritchard, the latter with Chas Laughton) will be playing the Great White Way simultaneously. May they both be hits . . . and then be filmed!

Brynie Foy, who many years ago produced the scientific detective color firm, *Return of Dr. X*, returns to sci-fi with *The Mysterious Island*. He was recently in Mexico scouting locations for the Jules Verne Sequel to 20,000 *Leagues*. Mexico will also be the locale for

The Living Idol and Frank Quattrocchi's GIGANTOSO which (NB) has had a title change to GIGANTURO. Wouldn't want you to see the wrong picture.

Sabre Productions has something up its sleeves called *In the Depths of Space*, story by Ed O'Callaghan, while Ivan (Sci-Fi Theater) Tors is toying with the notion of returning to fulllength milmic features with a spacer. In the opposite direction, a producer in England has his eye on Jules Verne's "Journey to the Center of the Earth"; for production in VolcanoScope? Old Jules has also been discovered by Young Tony Curtis, who would like to see himself and Alec Guinness spend "Five Weeks in a Balloon."

Winter, Autumn, Summer, Spring is the believe-it-or-not title of a marquee-twister about a scientist who does something about Mark Twain's observation that "everybody talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it." Experimenter discovers how to control the climate . . . *Flame in the Sky* will be a British Cinemascope production that will turn the telescope on a jet rocket plane which, quote, "breaks thru the space barrier". Sounds plane & fancy to me . . . Speaking of things fancy, they've fancied up FORBIDDEN PLANET (Metro-Galaxy-Meyer) with a reported \$11,000+ worth of art by Sascha Brastoff. Which reminds me, Leo: Whatever became of your robot film which was to be called *Sasha Gearhart*?

Curt Siodmak postcards me from up-the-Amazon where he's on location with a film company produc-

ing another of his ubiquitous scientific films. He doesn't mention the title, but from the location I'd suspect "Donovan's Shrunken Head" or "The Amazonian Brain" . . . Disney Studios just contacted me for "a dozen of the most lurid s.f. magazine covers of all time" in conjunction with pre-production work on their most ambitious scientific telefilm yet. I talked with Walt Disney for a half hour at a recent cocktail party where he revealed tantalizing tidbits to me about his forthcoming *Trip to Mars* and *Our Friend the Atom* . . . Frank Quattrocchi has created a "Mr. Atom" series for schoolrooms. (Oh to be young again.)

Fourteen feet will be the apparent height of the beast in *The Beast of Hollow Mountain*, first science fiction western. Monster has been animated by a new process known as Regiscope, and will prey on man and fellow-beast alike in CinemaScope color . . . Prexy James H. Nicholson of American Releasing Corp, himself an s.f. fan of a quarter century's standing, announces results so pleasing with *The Day the World Ended* that monster-maker Paul Blaisdell may be called on to create two or three more mutants for a sequel. But what could they possibly call it?—"The Day the World Ended Meets The Night the World Began Again?"

Ray Bradbury has given film rights to his subteenage fantasia, "Switch on the Night", to one Bob Bagley, former associate story editor of Revue Productions, for production at the Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles . . . Pilot pictures have been completed on telefilms titled

Captain Fathom (Curt Siodmak color project) and *General Universe* . . . I heard some weird rumor about Warner Bros. contemplating trending the *Kings Row* teleseries into a scientific segment with Richard Matheson the man in mind to effect the metamorphosis.

Mario Lanza may star in a remake of one of Lon Chaney's famous movie macabres, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Gaston Leroux opus. The make-up master of them all, Chaney, is himself up for a life story, with James Cagney anticipated for interpretation of the part . . . Basil Rathbone will essay a spooky role in *The Black Sleep*, and *The Ghost of Drury Lane* is supposed to have been produced in England . . . London Films, who gave us HGWell's immortal THINGS TO COME, has come up with something about which very little is known except that an Australian source informs me it's a fantasy of some sort, named *A Kid for Two Farthings*. I can say one thing: its star, Diana Dors, England's answer to Marilyn Monroe (and what a dreamy question), is a pretty fantastic piece of pulchritude . . . "Bell, Book & Candle", the bewitching stageplay, will be filmed by Phoenix Corp, Julian Blaustin producing. Blaustin, if I recall correctly, was responsible for the modern classic, *Day the Earth Stood Still* . . . Al Zimbalist has a sci-fi TV series in mind, "Tales of the Unknown", and William James another, "Science Fiction Filmmakers Presents". George Pal has been paged to mastermind a scientific video series.

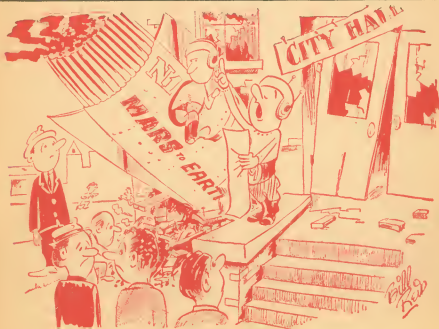
Digest List of Scientifilms in

Your Future (titles in capitals have actually been completed, others are in anything from shooting stage to merely talking): Atlantis; the Weapon; The Diplomat (from another planet); This Island; THE BRAIN MACHINE; INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS; INVASION BY FLYING SAUCERS; 1984; The Volunteer (to fly to Mars); Last Day on Earth (Anne Baxter); Spaceship; 13th Moon of Jupiter; The Floaters; FORBIDDEN PLANET; SHOCK!; Mr. Adam; Dark Dominion; To Walk the Night; FLAME GIRLS FROM SPACE; TIMESLIP; ON THE THRESHOLD OF SPACE; Toward the Unknown; The Fiend

from Outer Space; FallOut; Hell in the Heavens; Fortress Beneath the Sea; The Demolished Man; The 9 Billion Names of God; THE GAMMA PEOPLE; THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN; Cyclops, the One-Eyed Monster; Windblast; Sword in the Sky; Envoy Earth; Barrier of the Stars; Beyond the Barriers of Space; BRIDE OF THE ATOM; The Men-fish; The Vicarion; WORLD WITHOUT END.

—Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature. Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by those having news items to contribute.



"Citizens of Earth, we have come here on a peaceful mission . . ."

A Town For Mr. Sntzl

by

Stephen Wilder

According to what Dukey says, this guy called Sntzl is some sort of collector. Not taxes, or even stamps. His hobby is cities!

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

KEEP YOUR shirt on, warden. I know it's freezing out here. They'll be coming for us soon, so just relax.

Don't look at me like that. You can throw the book at me if you want. It figures. Only, I'm clean, warden. If you think I was to blame for what happened, you got the wrong guy. You know who it was; I don't have to tell you. Dukey, that's who. Little Dukey.

We always figure Dukey is nuts. You know, not nuts so it hurts him, but just nuts in this one special way of his. But Dukey always says everybody's got one kind of a brainbug or another, so it doesn't worry him any. That's Dukey for you.

I know Dukey years before he ever comes up here to State Prison, warden. All the time, he hears these voices. It isn't nothing new

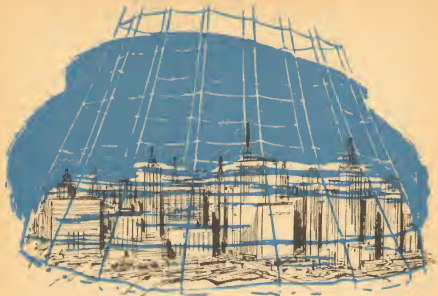
to Dukey. He didn't go stir crazy, if that's what you're thinking.

Once Dukey confides in me. It was right after you boys got him here on that income tax rap. He says, "Maxie, we been pals for a long time. Ain't we?"

"All our grown lives almost, Dukey," I say, choking with emotion.

"I ask you, Maxie, in the strictest of confidentials. Maxie, tell me. Maxie, do you hear voices?"

I look at him, to see if he is kidding. He gives me back the kind of look that goes with a royal flush in a two G poker pot. Hell, warden, I always knowed about Dukey and his voices. But he never went and told nobody before that. I don't know what to say, but Dukey gives me a different kind of look and when he gives that kind of look, when Dukey Maffito gives that kind of look, you come up



with an answer or else.

"You mean," I stammer, "voices lie in my head. Voices nobody else hears?"

"That's the kind of voices exactly what I mean," Dukey assures me.

I shake my head slowly, and each shake back and forth is like sticking a knife in Dukey's heart, I can tell. "Not me, Dukey," I admit. "I don't hear voices like that. I — I'm sorry, Dukey."

He pounds me on the back with a hand like a big pastrami. "That's rich," he tells me. "That's really rich, Maxie."

"I don't get it, Dukey," I say.

Dukey thumps my back again as the ten minute warning to lights out flashes along the cell block. "Well, I tell you, Maxie," he says, grinning at me in that million buck way of his. "Ten years ago if somebody tells me he don't hear the kind of voices I hear, I would go clean off my rocker. I'm a sensitive guy, Maxie. I got feelings. But now —"

"Yeah, boss?" I say, to show I am listening.

"Now it don't matter." Dukey taps his handsome skull. "In here, Maxie. In here is what counts. And in here, Maxie, I hear voices,

Do I look nuts?"

"Not you, Dukey!" I reply.

"Do I act nuts?"

"Not you, Dukey!"

"Then," says Dukey triumphant-ly, "I'm not nuts. It figures, don't it?"

"It figures," I tell him.

"Especially since the voices are the same guy talking all the time, Maxie."

"Is that right?" I ask him.

"Yeah. Sntzl is his name."

"Sntzl," I repeat, making a sound like I am blowing my nose.

"No, Sntzl."

"Sntzl?"

"Now you got it!" Dukey shouts happily. "Anyhow, all these years, Sntzl's bending my ear. Even in my sleep. That guy. He don't give me much rest. If it was anybody but Sntzl . . ."

"Oh," I say. "You like this Sntzl?"

"Like him?" Dukey says, laughing so hard he falls against the edge of the lower bunk in our cell.

"Like him, the man says."

"Well, don't you?" I ask.

"Like him? The guy is practically my brother, Maxie. You know what? He's —" here you can understand, warden, that Dukey's voice fades to a confidential whisper — "he's going to help us bust out of here."

THERE is a silence like the writers in the books you read call a profound silence. Hell, warden. I'm a lifer. Anytime he hears he's gonna break out, that's great news to a lifer. And I might as well admit it, warden. When Dukey talks, you listen. When Dukey says something, you believe. If Dukey says we're gonna break out of here, we're gonna break out. You seen what happened, huh? But it wasn't my fault. I just knew Dukey, is all.

Well, just then, the lights go out. I sit down on the bunk alongside of Dukey and say, "How is this Mr. Sntzl going to help us break out of here, Dukey, pal?"

"So now it's pal," Dukey laughs.

"We always been pals, Dukey," I try and assure him.

"Maxie, you know any big words?"

"Lots of them," I say, letting Dukey know I have two years of high school. "How do you like sesquicentennial?"

"Know what it means?" Dukey snaps.

"No. I just seen it somewhere once. Real pretty word."

"The word I have in mind," Dukey tells me, "is social anthropologist."

"Gosh," I say.

"You see, Maxie, Sntzl is a social anthropologist."

"That's why he can spring us?" I ask.

"No, stupid."

"So what's a social anthro-whatsiz?"

"Well," Dukey ponders, rubbing his jaw and giving me the studious look he learned at the floating crap games he used to run in town after prohibition, "a social anthropologist kind of collects things."

"Does which?" I ask.

"Collects things, you know what I mean."

"I know," I allow. But I really don't know at all, warden. "Like a antique dealer?" I ask brightly.

"No, stupid," Dukey says again. "Not like no antique dealer you ever saw. Sntzl collects — cities."

"Cities," I say, after another one of those silences. Did you say cities, Dukey?"

"I said cities."

"Mr. Sntzl collects cities?" Then I brighten. It's just a manner of speaking, I figure. I say, "Oh, I get you. He gets in control of city administration. Like that he collects cities?"

"Maybe you were not listening," Dukey tells me. "Some people collect stamps. You know, stampologists. Some people collect coins. You know, monoyologists. Some people collect cities, like Sntzl."

"Cityologists?" I ask.

"I don't know what they call

themselves, stupid," Dukey yells at me. "Sntzl never told me."

"Mr. Sntzl is going to get us out of stir on account of he collects cities?" I ask again.

"Yeah, stupid."

"I guess I am stupid, Dukey. Tell me how."

"Sntzl don't live here."

"In jail. I didn't figure he lives here. How could he spring us if he lives here."

"No. I mean he don't live around here at all."

"You mean he ain't a U. S. citizen?" I say, shocked. Come to think of it, warden, don't the name Sntzl sound kind of alien?

"He ain't even a Earth citizen," Dukey says in a low voice I can hardly hear.

"Hey, come on," I tell him.

"No kidding, Maxie. I wouldn't kid you on a thing like that."

"He's a Martian on a flying saucer?" I ask.

"Don't be a jerk. Maxie," Dukey says, irritated. "There ain't no such thing as a flying saucer. I already ask Mr. Sntzl that. And he ain't from Mars."

"Then where?" I say. I don't know to believe Dukey or not, warden. But I know one thing: I'll never let on I don't if I don't. Not to Dukey Maffito, not if I value my skin. You know Dukey's rep, don't you, warden. A guy like

Dukey you humor if you know what is good for you.

Dukey looks at me without talking. Then he blurts out, "From the fourth dimension, Maxie. That's where Sntzl comes from. The fourth dimension."

"The which?" I ask.

"It's simple, Maxie the way Sntzl explains it to me. He says on Earth there are three dimensions of extension. Length, he says. Breadth, he says. And thickness, he says. It figures, don't it?"

"It figures," I say. "So the fourth dimension is time?"

DUKEY shakes his head. "Time ain't a dimension of extension, stupid. Why don't you listen when I give you the lowdown? Look, Maxie. Breadth is a new direction at right angles to length, right?"

"Right," I say, to humor him. He left me back at first base, warden.

"And thickness, the third dimension of our world, is a new dimension at right angles to both length and breadth. Right?"

"Right," I echo.

"Now, on Sntzl's world, there's a fourth dimension which is at right angles to the three dimensions of length, breadth, and thickness. That's what makes Sntzl's world different from our world."

"All I want to know, Dukey," I say, "is how is Mr. Sntzl going to spring us." Well, okay, warden. If you got to know, I *was* interested. As who the hell would not be in my position?"

Dukey explodes, "You weren't listening, Maxie! I already told you how."

"Not me," I say.

"We got a world of length, breadth, and thickness," Dukey explains patiently, like I ain't had two years of high school or something. "Now, what would happen if you bumped into a world which only had length and breadth, *but no thickness?*"

"Search me," I say, after thinking a minute.

"Use your head, stupid. It's a flat world. It's all extension in length and breadth. It's got no thickness. You know what a wall looks like on that kind of a world? Even a wall fifty stories high?"

"No," I say.

"It looks just like a straight line. To get over a wall like that, you'd just have to walk across it, stupid. Look. They draw a square on that flatworld. Four lines, just a square. They put something inside it and because they can't go *up* — because they got no third dimension of thickness — it's a perfect safe. They can put anything valuable inside the four lines of the square

they want, and nobody on their world will be able to get near it. But what about somebody from our world, Maxie? We got three dimensions, what I mean. A drawn square don't stop us, We just reach over the line and take what's inside. Right?"

"I guess so," I say.

"Well," Dukey tells me with a mouse-eating cat smile, "that's exactly how Sntzl is gonna spring us from stir. Because his world is four dimensional and he can snatch anything out of our world he wants — including things or people out of prison!"

Begging your pardon, warden, but at that point I can't help saying, "Boy, I'd like to see the warden's face when it happens."

Dukey says, "Ain't you interested to know why Sntzl is going to do this for us?"

"I figure he likes you," I say lamely.

"I told you he was a social anthropologist, remember? A guy which goes around collecting cities? Well, he visits all the inhabited worlds in the universe, see, collecting cities. But not just any city, see. He's looking for something special."

"Like what?" I ask.

"Like the ideal state of being in each world. The ideal city of that civilization. The utopia, in

a manner of speaking. I been telling Sntzl about New York, Maxie. All these years I been telling him. He ain't never had a chance to visit it before, but he's out there now, looking around. If New York stacks up as the ideal state in this world — the typical best-loved kind of city we have — the place that stands for what Sntzl calls the sociological trends of our times — then he takes it."

"Takes it?" I say "Takes what?"

"New York City, stupid. He snatches it."

"The whole city and everybody?"

"Hell, yeah," Dukey assures me. "What did you think I was talking about? He just snatches it into the fourth dimension. It ain't no problem for Sntzl.

"But what about us?"

"That's our reward, Maxie. I was the guy who first told Sntzl about New York City. See just like I hear his voice all the time, he hears mine."

"What if he don't like New York?" I ask.

"Are you kidding? Is it the ideal city or ain't it the ideal city? The place that stands for what Sntzl calls the sociological trends of our times?"

"But what happens to New York City?" I want to know.

"Oh, Sntzl keeps it, I think. Has

a museum, kind of, in his world. Cram full of cities, that museum. New York City just becomes a part of it, that's all."

"But what about us?" I ask. "We're fifty miles away in State Prison."

"It's our reward, I already told you. He just sets us free, is all. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," I said thinking about those eight million people in New York City who were going to get put in Mr. Sntzl's museum. Then Dukey climbs up to the top bunk and in a minute he's snoring. After that, warden, I don't ask him nothing about Mr. Sntzl. It ain't my business, I figure, if Dukey don't want to talk about it. I almost forget all that crazy stuff about the fourth dimension when one day last week Dukey looks sick, real sick.

I ask him, "What's the matter, Dukey?"

"Remember Mr. Sntzl?" he says. He's so pale I think we better call the guard, but he don't want to.

"I remember what you said about Mr. Sntzl," I say.

"Well, he don't like New York. He says New York is not representative of the sociological trends of our times. So, he ain't taking New York back to the fourth dimension with him."

It don't mean much to me, war-

den. I still don't know at the time if I can believe Dukey or not. Or if he's just plain nuts. But anyhow I ask, "He found some other place?"

"Yeah," Dukey says glumly, naming the place. It sounds real nuts to me, but I can't get him to talk about it any more.

THAT WAS last week, warden. The rest you know. You're in town picking up your sister at the railroad station. I'm in town because I need special dental treatment for my impacted wisdom tooth. We see this flash. We come back, me with my guard and you with your sister. We hurry, but hurrying ain't going to help.

This Sntzl, warden. You get the idea now?

The ideal state ain't necessarily the best state. He collects them and he ought to know. Dukey says he sets his own standards. The ideal state is the one most typical, most representative of the sociological trends of the times, to use Dukey's own gobbledegook.

We got it made in jail. We're guaranteed three squares a day as long as we stay. We have a place to sleep and clothes to wear and all of it's free. We get free medical care and free dental care and we got a guaranteed job in one or another of the prison plants. We

got it made, in a manner of speaking. If that's what you want in life. Me, I don't want it. I hope what Mr. Sntzl did makes everybody wake up a little.

Yeah, warden. Sntzl.

Okay, I'll stand still. I hear the sirens too. I know the State

Police are coming. Boy, are they gonna be surprised. Because they'll see what we saw when we got back here to where the state prison used to be, warden.

They'll see a big hole in the ground.

That Sntzl. He's got it figured.



Antique Instruments



INSTRUMENTS, scientific instruments, are the extensions of man's faculties. "Science is a series of pointer readings," said Sir Arthur Eddington, and he was not far wrong. Most of the fantastic progress made in recent years has been the result of improved scientific instrumentation, from the electron microscope to radar.

Oddly enough, one of the oldest sciences—meteorology—employs instruments which differ basically not at all from their forbearers. Temperature—thermometer, wind velocity—vane or hot-wire anemometer, relative humidity — hair element.

It is this latter that is particularly amusing. Most readings of relative humidity as used in laboratories and industrial plants today are taken from the humble ether-washed hair, expanding and contracting as the moisture content of the air rises and falls.

True, other methods employing electronic instruments have been devised. But these are generally so complicated comparatively, and often so unreliable, that resort is had

to the hair for reliability!

A very clever instrument involving the measurement of resistance using a vacuum tube voltmeter and a piece of ceramic material, it was devised by a Chicago inventor. In many respects the relative humidity indicator was the most advanced ever developed. The experience of the inventor was astonishing. When he offered it to large firms whose business was instrument making, they dismissed it! — and went on measuring relative humidity with obsolete or complicated tools.

We are so accustomed to seize on new ideas that we think this attitude characteristic. It is not. There is a sluggishness and inertia often so bad, that the latest developments do not see light. One wonders throughout technological experience, how many other such devices are ignored?

And so the Weather Bureau continues to use archaic tools, the Air Force toys with monstrously complicated equipments, while superb instruments are at their collective fingertips. What price, progress . . . ?

There was no way to tell what was inside the metallic object. A young astronomer thought it was a tiny space ship, since like a meteor—

It Fell From The Sky

by

S. M. Jenesshaw

Illustrated by W. E. Terry

THE CRATE was delivered through the side door of the planetarium, where such crates would be delivered. It was well-padded in a larger box and stenciled HANDLE WITH CARE. It was taken on the day of its arrival to the office of the chief astronomer.

A much younger astronomer, hardly more than a tyro, walked carefully alongside the crate as the laborers brought it in. "Easy now," the young astronomer said. "Easy does it. Please don't drop that thing. There's no telling what's inside."

"We been carrying things for years, pal," one of the laborers said. "Don't worry about us."

"Well, I think I have a very important find here."

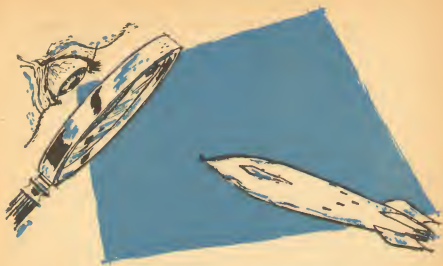
"Yes, sir, doc," the second worker said. "Don't you worry, doctor,"

he added, using the word doctor to placate the nervous young astronomer who had not been a doctor of astronomy very long. "We'll watch it like it was a baby."

"Thank you," the young astronomer said as he went with them down the hallway and then up a ramp to the chief astronomer's office.

The two laborers put the crate down on a large desk there in the office and waited while the young astronomer signed their receipt. The crate, double-crated all the way, had come a long way from the southern part of the country and they wanted to make sure they had a receipt. Those scientist-fellows could be funny guys.

An elderly janitor was re-arranging the dust in the chief astronomer's office when the crate and the young astronomer arrived.



"Shouldn't put that thing down there," the janitor said.

"Why not?"

"Chief don't like his desk cluttered, son."

"Cluttered? This is the southern meteorite you've been reading about in the papers," the young astronomer said.

"Meteorite, huh? Don't read the papers much, son, I guess. Why all the fuss about a meteorite?" the janitor demanded. "Planetarium's full of them."

"Not a meteorite like this one," the young astronomer said, eager to talk, wanting to tell someone about his important find and the long hard trip up from the south

and the newspapermen who had been very doubtful.

"Then it's a special kind of meteorite?" the janitor asked politely. But the janitor did not seem particularly interested.

"It's special, all right," the young astronomer said. "Do you know what a meteorite is?" he asked pedantically.

"Sure I do. Been around this here planetarium long enough. Meteorite be a piece of rock come in from out of space."

"That's right," the young astronomer said. "Most meteorites are. But this one . . ."

"Well?" the janitor asked when the young astronomer paused.

"I think," the young astronomer said, spacing his words for dramatic effect, "that this one is not an ordinary meteorite. I think that this one is a spaceship. A spaceship, you understand? From somewhere out there in space."

The janitor looked at the crate, smiling condescendingly. "Spaceship, huh? It ain't as big as a kid-dycar, you know it?"

"I still think it's a spaceship."

"Well, it's your crate." And the janitor left with his dusting mop just as the chief astronomer arrived, looking preoccupied as usual.

"Glad to see you again, young fellow," he said. "I got your wire. This it?"

"Yes," the young astronomer said. They both looked at the crate.

The Chief nodded. "Might as well open it, son."

NODDING too and nervous now, the young astronomer attacked the double crate with a chisel and a hammer and soon had the first wooden shell broken and stripped away. He attacked the second shell and was trembling with eagerness when he finally stripped away the padding and revealed what was inside the crate.

"Well, now," the Chief said, studying it.

What they saw was a gray-black

metallic object as big as a child's toy car. It was roughly projectile-shaped, with a pointed front and a flat, blunt back. It tapered gracefully but its surface was not smooth. The surface was puckered and twisted and scarred.

"I'm sure it's a spaceship, Chief!" the young astronomer cried breathlessly. "Look at the shape. It's too regular for a meteorite. Except for the surface roughness, it's almost a perfect projectile."

"Had it assayed?" the Chief demanded. He seemed interested.

"Rare metals, mostly," the young astronomer answered promptly. "Titanium, magnesium. Some aluminum and some iron. And this will get you, Chief; inside, there seems to be a lot of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and hydrogen. I don't have to tell you —"

"The basic stuff of life," the Chief Astronomer said, clearly impressed. "If it were a spaceship — and mind you, I'm only saying if — the fused, roughened surface could be accounted for by its passage through our atmosphere. Tell me, have you found any means of entrance? Any openings?"

"No, sir," the young astronomer admitted, but he was still enthusiastic. "I tell you, sir, any airlocks or ports could have been fused by the heat of traveling through the

atmosphere, too. This can't be anything but a spaceship — from somewhere out there."

"Why don't you crack it open and —"

"Oh, no sir!" the young astronomer cried in a shocked voice. "And risk killing the creatures in there? Because they might still be alive, sir. They might be alive and able to communicate with us. Do you realize what this means, sir — communication with intelligent life forms from another world?"

"Intelligent, maybe," the Chief said. "But sure small. Why the whole ship, if it is a ship, could be carried by a couple of husky laborers."

"Size is only relative sir. Their small size doesn't preclude intelligence. Besides, if they came here in a spaceship, before we were capable of building one, they're obviously intelligent."

"That's true," the Chief said. "I tell you what we'll do. We'll have some metallurgists in tomorrow, first thing. See if they can find some structural flaws in this projectile of yours. If they can, and if they can open them, well—"

"Those flaws would probably be along the lines of an airlock, fused now under the heat of atmosphere friction!" the young astronomer cried enthusiastically.

"Don't jump to conclusions, son. This is not the profession for jumping to conclusions. At any rate, we'll see tomorrow." And, nodding, the Chief Astronomer went out to his other duties in the planetarium.

The young astronomer remained with the uncrated projectile until night came. Life, he thought. Life from another world. The thought made him giddy with wonder. He got up and went to the projectile for the hundredth time, stroking its roughened, heat-blasted surface, caressing it almost.

Tomorrow, he thought. Tomorrow — the greatest discovery in the history of science. Because it was a spaceship. He knew it was a spaceship. It had to be a spaceship. And inside, waiting — creatures from another world.

"Have to go now, doc," the old janitor said suddenly.

He looked up with a start. "Is it closing time already?"

"Sure is. And don't you worry none about that there thing. Ain't nothing going to happen to it over night."

"Well, I guess so," And reluctantly, the young astronomer left the room. He paused in the doorway, though, and looked back at the small spaceship again, — lovingly, eagerly. Tomorrow, he thought. Tomorrow we'll open her up and have our first contact with

life from outside . . .

IT SURE was a nuisance, the elderly janitor thought after the astronomer had been gone for some time. They think it's important and maybe it's important, but it's only a job to me, and the more excited they get the messier they get. Look at this mess, now, he thought. And, a tired old figure, bent to pick up the broken slats from the crate, the padding, the bolts and nails which had been left about.

When he finished it was quite late. He was about to lock up the Chief Astronomer's office for the night when he heard a noise.

It wasn't much of a noise at first, but it grew louder.

He couldn't locate it in the beginning, but for some reason it frightened him. He did not know why.

Then he located it — because it became much louder. It was a metallic grinding, as of machinery. It was coming from the Chief Astronomer's desk.

From the projectile-shaped meteorite which the young astronomer had insisted was a spaceship. The janitor had laughed silently to himself earlier in the day. He did not believe in spaceships. But now he wasn't laughing.

The grinding grew intense — and rose off into a supersonic range.

The silence was worse.

And a seam appeared in the meteorite.

Appeared and — grew.

Awed, the elderly janitor watched. The spaceship or meteorite or whatever it was opened like a rotten fruit splitting in the sun. Something spilled out.

Not something. Things.

At first the janitor was very frightened. He wanted to call for help, but his fright quickly subsided. This projectile-shaped rock had come from the south, the very deep south, the tropical south where all sorts of bugs lived.

Bugs, he thought. Bugs is all they are.

They spilled from the seam in the spaceship-meteorite-rock. Rock, he thought. It was just a rock with bugs inside. A spaceship, that was funny. Who ever heard of a spaceship driven by funny-looking little bugs instead of ordinary folks?

The janitor ran out into the hall and to the sink closet, where he kept a spraygun of insecticide. He returned to the office. There were dozens of the tiny bugs on the surface of the desk now, running about.

He sprayed them and sprayed through the crack in the rock, too. It took several seconds for the insecticide to take effect, but it was potent all right. It was deadly to the little bugs. One at a time they

died, staggering wildly about the desk's surface and then laying still. Finally, all of them were dead.

Chuckling because the young astronomer had thought the funny rock with the bugs inside was a spaceship, the elderly janitor picked up one of the funny little bugs to examine it. His eyes weren't so good and he drew the bug close to have a good look at it. At first he was laughing.

Then he wasn't laughing.

Then he dropped the bug and

ran to call the astronomers. But he knew it was too late because all the bugs were dead.

He had dropped the bug from his suddenly nerveless pincers because while it truly was a funny looking little bug like you might or might not find in the south, *it was a funny little bug which wore clothing.*

He ran out into the hall clicking his mandibles excitedly and pounded down the corridor with all six of his limbs working like pistons.

THE END



"Poor chap, the silence of space finally got him!"

INTRUDER FROM THE VOID

by

Milton Lesser

Alarm bells announced the coming of an alien so we got set for battle. But fighting could be fatal — against an invincible enemy!

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

IF the alien had actually studied Earth mores and culture he could not have selected a better spaceship for his raiding party. As it was, though, he hit upon the *Star of Capricorn* entirely by accident.

She was a ten thousand tonner out of Pluto Station, bound for the Sirian System. She was brand new and was supposed to make the deep-space jump in less than half the previous time record. I know all about that: as a member of her crew — even if only a cabin boy — I got it drummed into me. So, they gave her a heart-thumping sendoff at Pluto Station but most of our passengers were used to that for the Company had invited along as many celebrities as could be crammed inside the *Star of Capricorn's* gleaming silver hull.

Ask me: I know all about those celebrities. I'm Charlie Marle, a

member of the First Class steward team and with my buddies I'd about been celebritied to death before the SOC even hit subspace. After a very few hours of it the word "boy" became an unlovely refrain in my ears. They were in deep interstellar space, those celebrities, but as the expression goes, they expected the moon.

Well, we gave them it. Or, we tried to. That was Company policy and you sure as hell couldn't blame the Company, after they had invited along for the maiden run — free of charge, thank you — every politician and video star within ferrying distance of Pluto Station.

The one who gave me the biggest headache of all was Lorna van Horn, the video queen. I know you don't have to be told about Lorna when it comes to the looks department. Let us say she is to



most stacked dames as most stacked dames are to your maiden aunt. Let us also say to get the record straight, that, Charlie Marle likes dames — particularly of the stacked variety.

Unless they happen to behave like Lorna van Horn.

She didn't only ask for the moon, she expected it at once and served up to her on a platter like food. And if she didn't get what she wanted when she wanted it, there was hell to pay and, unfortunately, our chief steward knew how to dish out the currency of that realm. The van Horn gave him plenty of practice: she had our whole crew hopping from blastoff until all normal activity aboard the Star of Capricorn came to an end thirty-six hours after departure, with the arrival of the alien.

BEFORE I get on with that, though, I ought to tell you that Lorna van Horn was the only woman aboard the SOC. If you're up on your space lore, you'd already know that — for it's a generally held superstition that a woman on any spacer's maiden voyage is bad luck. You can imagine there was plenty of grumbling in the crew quarters of the SOC, even though Lorna was the Judy Carlsle or Marilyn Monroe of her day, to compare her with a couple of

beauty queens of more ancient vintage.

Anyway, it was the first and — praise be! — only meeting thus far between *homo sapiens* and whatever else lives out there among the worlds of deep space. This lack of contact always surprises people, I know — but they have the wrong idea. Look at it this way: there are some two hundred billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, with one-in-three having planets. Of those, perhaps there is one planet in a hundred inhabited or inhabitable by life forms which we would recognize as such. That doesn't sound like much but the figure comes out to some seventy million potential abodes of intelligent extra-terrestrial life. That *does* sound like a lot; it sounds as if space ought to be choke full of aliens waiting in line to shake hands or tentacles or flippers or pseudopods or what-have-you with the early human explorers.

Except that the galaxy is more than a hundred thousand light years in diameter — which gives you a lot of room to spread out. And also, seventy million is a lot of potential meeting places. Figure it this way: we have now colonized seven extra-terrestrial planetary systems, and this has taken us the better part of a hundred years. At the same rate—and there's no rea-

son to believe we'd accelerate — it would take a thousand years to hit seventy inhabitable worlds — *or a billion years to hit all of them!*

Little wonder there's been only one meeting so far. And after what happened when the meeting finally did occur, we ought to thank our lucky stars.

Anyhow, the red alarm lights began blinking suddenly in every public room of the Star of Capricorn and a voice which I recognized as that of Hunter Talbott, the Second Purser called across the P. A. system: "Your attention please! This is no alarm drill. This is not a drill. This is the real thing. Please await orders from crew members."

I remember staring blankly at the wall mike. Orders from crew members. But we didn't know anything. We had no idea what was going on.

At the time, I was returning to the van Horn's cabin for my third try with the same Spice o'Mars cocktail. The first time it had been too warm for the van Horn's epicurean taste buds. The second time it was so cold it numbed her lips, if not her vocabulary. Now, on the third try, she looked at what was in the cocktail glass and said:

"You fool. You utter silly fool. Instead of removing the ice you have allowed it to melt. I won't be able to drink it at all now. Here,

take it away. Take it away, I tell you."

I winced. I'm a normal eighteen-year-old with all the usual instincts and it was a shame to see all that beauty of face and form wasted on a dame with the instincts of an alley cat or at best a fishmonger.

I said in my best of-course-you're-right-ma'am voice: "Begging your pardon, Miss van Horn, but I won't be able to take it away or do anything like that until I get further orders from my team chief. There's some kind of emergency."

"What kind of emergency?"

Naturally, I hadn't been told. Lorna van Horn knew as much about it as I did, but I didn't say that. "We couldn't possibly tell you that," I said.

"I insist. I order you to tell me," the van Horn said, and waited impatiently for an answer. There was none that I could give her, although official-sounding mumbo-jumbo is usually the prescribed medicine in such cases.

Just then, though, the Star of Capricorn shuddered through its entire length. It was no slight shudder. I fell to the floor of Miss van Horn's cabin and all that has made Miss van Horn famous fell on top of me and for a breathtaking few seconds while we both — but mostly Miss van Horn — tried to unscramble, it was worth all of her

petulance. This would be something to talk about in crew quarters, I was thinking — until the SOC shuddered a second time.

"What — is it?" the van Horn demanded, getting unsteadily to her feet and trying to smooth the shimmering sheathlike gown she wore.

There was no time for the prescribed mumbo-jumbo. At that moment the P. A. called urgently: "All crew to Executive Briefing. Crew to Executive Briefing at your leisure."

At your leisure. Naturally, it did not mean at your leisure. It meant quite the reverse but under no circumstances were the passengers to be alarmed.

"He said at your leisure," the van Horn purred. "So take my drink back and fix it for me first."

"I'm sorry, ma'am —"

Suddenly the beautiful face became mean and the long hand whipped up and then I was wiping Spice o'Mara off my face and uniform collar. The van Horn temper, at least, was not a publicity man's stunt, although they made it sound like something you'd just love to live with. I turned on my heel and got out of there. As the door irised shut behind me the van Horn hurled her empty glass at it

Briefing room. The Big Man himself — Captain Cyrus Manicher — was waiting as we filed in from all sections of the ship. Cyrus the Great as we called him was a tall handsome man who had not only approached but conquered middle age. He stood ramrod straight and walked briskly and didn't have a line on his handsome face or a gray hair in his head and would probably go right on like that until his sixtieth birthday. He was an unbending tyrant of a captain but he got results and there was nothing petulant about him. I think every member of the crew considered it an honor to work under Cyrus the Great although none of us would have admitted it.

"Men," he said in his booming voice when all of us had assembled, "I won't waste any words. Those two impacts you felt were warning shots fired by some energy weapon we have never seen before. Hovering ten miles to stellar north and sending a boarding party this way is the first alien ship encountered in the history of mankind's journey to the stars."

There was a shocked silence as we all took that in. Was the alien unfriendly? Apparently, because he had fired on an unarmed ship. Did he have us at his mercy? Captain Cyrus said that he did, and so we had no choice but to let in the

THE first big surprise came when I reached the Executive

boarding party.

Which is exactly what happened, some ten minutes later. It gave us quite a jolt.

The boarding party turned out to be a party of one. And it didn't come through any of the *Star of Capricorn's* two dozen airlocks.

It simply materialized.

Inside Executive Briefing. Without warning. Without a sound. One moment it wasn't there; the next, it was. If it was trying to scare the hell out of us, it succeeded, but that was nothing compared to what happened next.

The alien was a glob. Slightly luminous, but a glob — shapeless, pulsing with life, a gray green luminous glob half a dozen feet across. It said:

"We meet quite by accident, bipeds."

It waited and let that sink in; not what it had said. We had known that ourselves. But the fact that it had spoken — mentally, for no sound was heard. And damn it all, in our own language. Of course, it could be that there are no language barriers where mental telepathy is concerned. But we were impressed. Impressed hell. I suddenly felt my knees beginning to shake.

"Although, to be truthful," the alien glob went on, "I encourage such accidental meetings. Since I

am for all intents and purposes immortal — I reproduce, you see, by binary fission — I have had a considerable number of such encounters. This, however, is the first with featherless, latterally symmetrical — and let me see — heterosexual bipeds. Naturally, I shall be seeking a memento."

"What," Captain Cyrus asked, "do you mean by a memento?"

"Something to take back with me, my dear Captain. You might say, to a museum. Yes, to a museum."

"Something of our choosing?"

"Something of my choosing. Something which I consider most important."

You could see Cyrus the Great wasn't happy about this. "Most important?" he demanded.

"Yes. Yes, indeed, captain. Something without which mankind — as you call yourselves — could not have progressed. The key to your achievements, to all your achievements. That is the memento I seek."

THERE was a silence while we took that in. Then Captain Cyrus said: "But how do you know you'll find such a thing aboard our ship?"

"I'll find it," the alien predicted. "It is often the unexpected, you see, and a ship of this size will

probably carry whatever it is I am looking for."

"We would like to be friendly," Captain Cyrus said. "This meeting could hold portents of a magnificent future for both our peoples. But we might as well be frank with one another. What happens if you continue to insist upon this memento of our meeting and then find it—only to learn it's something we won't part with? It stands to reason that if it is indeed something which accounts for the rise of mankind from savagery to civilization and interstellar conquest — we'd want to keep it. There's no sense in your people and our people getting off on the wrong foot and —"

"Fool!" The Alien's thought waves were so strong they were practically painful. "Do you think I care about your people? As for my people, I have none. I have said I am immortal, reproducing not my own kind but *my own self* by binary fission. I motivate them all. I make decisions. It is my will which determines in everything and if this sounds melodramatic by your standards believe me I don't mean it so. Is that clear?"

"You are aboard my ship," Captain Cyrus said, "as a guest. You will be treated as a guest until you indicate other treatment is necessary. But I would deeply regret it if the first meeting between our

races were anything but friendly."

"First meeting!" scoffed the alien. "And last meeting as well, Captain. Do you think I actually care about your people or your home planet, wherever and whatever it is? Once I find my memento and bring it home to the museum of such mementos I have, I am no longer interested. I want no conquest. I need nothing you possess. But I do want — and intend to get — that memento."

"If we refuse? If we feel our hospitality has been abused?"

"Captain. I wish for you to understand that I am not your guest. I boarded this ship and although you had used every device at your command, you could not have stopped me. You cannot destroy me. You cannot detain or restrain me."

"Lieutenant Harrington!" Captain Cyrus called. Our Security Officer stepped forward on the double and shouted:

"Yes, sir?"

"A sample, lieutenant. No more than a sample, please."

"Yes, sir," Harrington said happily. Apparently, he didn't like the alien's arrogance — and you couldn't blame him. We all felt that way but we were still bewildered by the unexpected encounter. Lieutenant Harrington, though, was a trained soldier.

He moved forward confidently, approaching the glob of luminous matter. For its own part, the alien remained motionless. In fact, since its materialization here in Executive Briefing, it hadn't moved at all.

Lieutenant Harrington unsheathed the stunner at his belt and fired it point blank at the alien. I was close by: I saw the lieutenant thumb the intensity range down to medium-low, enough to stun but not to kill a man or a man-sized animal.

The blast hit the alien head-on—and nothing happened!

Harrington thumbed the weapon to greater intensity and tried again. A moment later, he had notched it all the way to lethal — with negative results.

"Now!" said the alien.

Something lashed out quickly, blurringly. Pseudopod? Probably, but it was gone in the blinking of an eye.

And so was Harrington.

There was a blurry, unreal image of Harrington being engulfed by the luminous glob — and that was all.

"I will look for a memento," the alien told us quietly. "Which means I will search your ship. When I find what I seek — whatever it is which makes for mankind the difference between savagery and civi-

lization or perhaps between destruction and existence — I shall take it and go. I shall not bother you again but you must believe it is not because I fear you. I could destroy every weapon you throw against me. This is no boast, as you have seen. It includes atomic weapons and fusion weapons. I live on matter and energy, you see. I can absorb either."

"Then nothing can hurt you?" Dr. Carew, our chief medical officer, asked.

"Nothing, I assure you. Do you believe?"

The thought penetrated. For a moment, the alien mind revealed itself — naked and frightful. We believed. We could do nothing but believe.

"Then find your trophy and go," Captain Cyrus said wearily.

The alien rolled forward like a giant luminous ball and disappeared through the wall of Executive Briefing.

IN retrospect, it almost appears as if the human genius lies in betting. Because in the next twenty-four hours, once the alien's presence became an accepted fact, a rash of gambling covered the *Star of Capricorn* all the way from crew quarters to First Class.

There was only one type of wager made, though: bets on what

the alien would select as its memento, as the most significant tool in the bag of tricks which had carried mankind up from savagery in a score of thousand years.

The divergency of opinion was amazing. The human brain — or, more particularly, the cerebral cortex — was an early favorite. But then the speculation became more subtle. Obviously, any intellectual race would have a brain or the equivalent of a brain. Much as we hated to admit it, there was nothing special about the human brain.

The opposed human thumb for grasping and delicate work? It was the next choice. But any biological instrument, it was decided while the alien had the run of our ship, would probably be duplicated elsewhere.

Man's Hope? That was the next thought, but an optimistic one. All creatures everywhere — given a modicum of intelligence and a hostile environment — would need hope. Man's hope — and hence his faith and his religion — were wonderful things, but not unique.

Our inventive genius? The bets were fast and furious. No, not our inventive genius, because the alien glob was naked and unarmed and our inventive genius hadn't been able to hurt it.

The wheel? someone suggested. The invention of the wheel — which

made all other machinery possible. The answer, again, was negative. The South American Indian civilizations had managed quite well without the wheel, thank you, and while they hadn't reached the stars they had done pretty well with what they had.

Then what? A list of our inventions and achievements was quickly drawn — not in one but in a dozen places aboard ship. There were bets — often with foolish odds given — but no conclusion was reached.

And meanwhile the alien searched and searched; without another word for any of us.

LORNA van Horn was piqued by the alien's arrival. Naturally it took some of the starch out of her own sails. Not only was she the only woman aboard the *Star of Capricorn*, but she was a very beautiful woman. She had been an attraction — *the* attraction aboard ship. Now, however, she had receded into temporary limbo. No one thought of anything but the alien.

In a way you couldn't blame Lorna van Horn — if anything, she became more capricious and her temper more violent. And since I was the member of the crew directly responsible for Lorna's comfort and caprices, it all was vented on

me.

"Charlie, that isn't right!" she would cry.

And, "Charlie, look what you've done!"

And, "Get out of here — oh, get out!" — with various items hurled to get her point across.

After a while I got used to it. After a while I took it for granted, but I vowed I would never see another Lorna van Horn video show as long as I lived.

The third morning after the alien's arrival I brought the van Horn her breakfast in bed. As she had put it — "with that horrid creature aboard" — she wasn't leaving her cabin. Probably this was a defense mechanism because the "horrid creature" had all but stolen the show. Anyhow, it meant I had to bring Lorna her meals.

"These eggs are cold," Lorna said.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, then I won't eat them."

"As you wish, ma'am."

"Don't stand there agreeing with me," the van Horn screamed.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh! — and what are you so preoccupied about, you little fool?"

That, as they say in the repair bays, dented it. "You're preoccupied lady," I stormed. "Not me. I'm thinking about the alien. Sure I am. Isn't it normal? Aren't you inter-

ested? No, not you. You're preoccupied all right. With yourself."

"I," the van Horn declared, "couldn't possibly be interested in the alien. And, as for your insolence —"

She said it in a soft voice. I should have been warned.

Then she exploded violently up from the bed, pajama'd limbs flashing, as she hurled the tray of food at me. I ducked. I was getting good at ducking. I vowed right then to apply on reaching Sirius for a transfer to the 'low decks crew.

At that moment the P. A. blared: "Attention, please. Your attention! Crew to Executive Briefing! This is urgent."

"That means you, . stupid!" Lorna bawled at me. And, as you can realize, I was only too glad to get out of there.

THE alien was waiting in Executive Briefing. When we had all assembled, he said:

"I am sure you will be pleased to hear I am leaving your ship within a few moments."

We all held our breaths. This was it.

"With your memento?" Captain Cyrus asked.

"With that which is responsible for mankind's climb to the stars, yes."

"As you may know," Captain

Cyrus said, "there have been wagers —"

"I couldn't possibly be interested in your wagers. I merely want and will take my memento."

That was all. We blinked and the alien was gone. With no farewells, but — if we were to believe him — with his memento.

The Captain looked at us bleakly. "All right, men," he said. "Suppose we find what's missing."

We were so busy, we almost forgot about the passengers for the next few hours. We turned the *Star of Capricorn* inside out without finding anything missing.

We were about to give up, ready to believe the alien had taken something insignificant, something

which we would never miss.

And then all at once I thought I knew. I smiled what they later said was a grim and strangely mysterious smile for any eighteen year-old cabin boy.

The alien was a glob or psi-powered protoplasm — seeking something unique in man. There was something unique aboard the *Star of Capricorn*. Maiden voyages are usually all stag, but this one was an exception. The alien glob, I remembered, was asexual, reproducing by binary fission.

What, from its viewpoint, uniquely made mankind possible?

When I got to Lorna van Horn's cabin, it was empty.

THE END



Blood Stream Invasion



OF all the medical miracles of the Twentieth Century, perhaps none has shown more results than the transfusion of blood. The lives this process has saved must be incalculable. Quite recently the technique of allowing blood-plasma to flow into the bloodstream by gravity was modified to the point where the precious fluid actually *pumped* into it, in order to get the necessary fluid to the vital organs like the brain, in a hurry.

Another technique for saving lives, the administration of oxygen, has also given medicine a powerful tool. But what if the lungs won't accept the oxygen, what if

they're paralyzed, or severely burned, or the heat attack does its dirty work?

Scientists have begun tackling this difficulty and have come up with an ingenious solution. They direct oxygen into the blood.

This is more difficult than it sounds and so far has been done only with experimental animals, but the experimenters have high hopes that it can be applied to human beings as well. You can't pump bubbles of gas into a bloodstream; immediately an embolism is set up, a gaseous bubble which may reach the heart and cause it to stop pumping. The effect of the lesser possi-

bility is much like that of the "bends" the disease which afflicts anyone who is subjected to a sudden decrease in air pressure.

To counter these troubles the gas must be introduced in the form of the smallest bubbles possible. This is accomplished by passing oxygen through a porcelain filter which cleans and miniaturizes the bubbles of gas. Previously injected into the bloodstream, a "wetting agent" lowers the surface tension of the blood and enables it to absorb the gaseous oxygen. In this way, the oxygen can be introduced safely into the venous system without ever once nearing the lung structure. In an age when lungs are frequently injured by fire and smoke, it can be seen how important this technique may become. It's not as efficient yet as the regular oxygen breathing method, but it's a definite beginning.

This is just another example of a trend which any observer may notice. In modern medicine there is a tendency to utilize every conceivable application of physical science to medical problems. The region of bio-physics is a fertile and wide open field, one in which almost limitless things may be done.

The study of neuro-surgery and the close connection between it and the techniques of cybernetics offers a strong example of this. The use of the encephalograph for the study of the electrical nerve currents within the brain is another example. It's true that Man isn't a machine, but some of his system acts remarkably like a collection of gears, wires, motors, and batteries. Men may not know much about life yet—but they know plenty about machines . . . And there is a connection!



"I explained to him how we took 36,000,000 light years to get here, and all he said was, 'Get back on the sidewalk, kid.'"

Letters from the Readers

BACK IN THE FOLD

Dear Bill:

I had given up hope for both IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES as a lost cause after the announcement last year that *Madge* would go bi-monthly. But, I was at my magazine dealer the other day while he was checking in his new issues. All of a sudden he came to TALES—the March issue. That cover really caught my eye!

Anyway, I bought it and just finished reading the departments, laughing at the cartoons, and surveying the issue as a whole. I've come to the conclusion that if the stories are anything like I think they'll be you've got something!

I've decided to give both *Madge* and *Tales* a try again and I have the feeling I'll be pleased. If that's the case you'll find a subscription coming in sooner than you think!

Michael R. Krakomberger
183 East St.
Buffalo 7, N. Y.

Sure, both Madge and Tales are

bi-monthly, alternating on the news-stands. But in effect this makes us a monthly since you'll get the same fine science fiction entertainment in both of them! Glad to have you back, Mike—but you never really should have stayed away! . . . wh

BETTER EACH ISSUE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Sorry to say, I finished the March issue of TALES. Emphatically speaking—what an issue! It appears to me that each one gets better than the last.

ENEMY OF THE QUA and THE DOORMEN OF SPACE were very good stories—space adventure throughout.

The shorts in the issue were also enjoyable. As usual, I enjoyed the features, departments, and cartoons, the latter being something of a riot.

Anyway, I'm so sure of bigger and better issues that here is my subscription for the next 36 numbers.

Walter C. Brandt

Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Cal.

Subscription now entered and 36 big issues of science fiction coming your way! Speaking of subscriptions, everyone please note the new group of FREE books we're offering this month. Believe us, we worked quite a while getting this combination together as a subscription bonus, and we think it's something terrific! SCIENCE FICTION CARNIVAL is the new anthology edited by Mack Reynolds and Fredric Brown, loaded with top-notch stories by the best writers in the field; THIS ISLAND EARTH needs no introduction to those of you who saw the recent movie of the same title. The novel by Raymond F. Jones from which the picture was made is something you'll want for your library. And THE DEMOLISHED MAN is an absolute must for every science fiction enthusiast. This terrific novel is shortly to hit your movie theatre with Jose Ferrer starring in the title role. All in all we think this is the biggest science fiction bonus we could possibly have gotten together. And all three books are yours as a gift from us with your subscription. Fill out the coupon on page 130 today and join TALES' family of subscribers. wkh

AS GOOD AS MADGE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I enjoyed the March issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES. The magazine improves with each issue and I'm beginning to enjoy it as much as IMAGINATION, your companion

magazine.

Outstanding in the March issue were ENEMY OF THE QUA by Dwight V. Swain, and THE DOORMEN OF SPACE by S. M. Tenneshaw. That cover was something too!

Keep SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE; it's unusual and very good. As much as I like the stories, I'd like to have the letter column lengthened. But I understand your predicament of having some readers wanting it and others against it. You can't please everybody.

Incidentally, I thought ENEMY OF THE QUA would have been even better if it had been longer. As to other stories in the issue, LATE ARRIVAL was also very good; LIKE A SILVER ARROW by Jorgensen was a bit on the dull side with a well-used plot. But THIS TREASURE IS MINE! and NO PLACE FOR AN EARTHMAN were both above average.

Personally, I prefer the action story—though I do feel an occasional humorous piece—perhaps by Bloch—would be a good change of pace.

Keep up the good work with both of your science fiction magazines and I'll be happy. Although waiting two months between issues gets me mighty impatient!

Dan Lesco
5543 Clement Drive
Maple Heights, Ohio

As we said before, both our magazines amount to a steady monthly publication, so you don't really have to wait too long! Also, if you're that impatient, send in your subscription today—subscribers always get their copies mailed in

heavy protecting envelopes weeks ahead of newsstand publication.
w/h

us a line again soon.

w/h

SOLID ENJOYMENT

Dear Bill Hamling:

The first thing I want to say is, Thank You! Now I'll tell you why.

IMAGINATIVE TALES is one of the four magazines putting action back into science fiction. Your companion magazine, IMAGINATION, of course, is also one of the four. After reading the current issue of TALES I have come to the conclusion that TALES is giving the most action of the four.

Most magazines try to give a full length novel in 30 pages, and so come out with 30 pages of all plot and no story. In *Madge* and *Tales* we get 130 pages of good action-packed stories. When I say 130 pages I am including your lead novels along with the short stories. On the action-novel side please continue to give us such wonderful yarns as TERROR STATION, THE METAL EMPEROR, THE COSMIC BUNGLERS, and ENEMY OF THE QUA.

This was my first letter to a science fiction magazine, and will no doubt be my last. So now I can sit back anticipating coming issues of *Madge* and *Tales* confident that science fiction has a chance after-all!

Jerry Greene
482 E. 20th St.
Hialeah, Fla.

We can promise you many fine action novels are coming up in both of our magazines, Jerry. So watch for them—and by all means drop

ONE AYEM THREAT

Dear Bill Hamling:

This is my first letter to any magazine but I guess I picked a good one to start with!

First, let me say I thought the lead novel in the current issue of TALES was terrific. I sat up until one a. m. to finish it!

Second, I get a big kick out of the cartoons. Everyone enjoys a good laugh now and then—and the cartoons you feature certainly provide that.

Now for the complaint department. Just one: I get so doggone mad at your cover artists when their painting doesn't match the lead story inside the magazine. Hope this will not happen too often in the future.

Matter of fact, if the covers start folowing the lead story more closely, I'll subscribe.

Fair enough?

Beatrice Laskowski
614 Chapel St.
Schenectady, N. Y.

Stop being mad at the cover artists, Bea. Sometimes they have to take "artistic license" in depicting a scene from a lead story for purpose of composition and dramatic effect. We're sure you'll find that most covers on Madge and Tales stick pretty close to the lead novel. Take the cover on this issue for example. We'll be looking for that subscription!
w/h

NO MORE HE SAYS . . .

Dear Ed:

To quote you from the March

issue of TALES: "—that's what we meant by action science fiction. A perfect example is Dwight Swain's novel this issue. More coming up!"

How can you keep your editorial self-respect and write a statement like that?

Boy, this guy Swain might as well pack up his little bag and go back to the farm.

More coming up! No, NO! *Anything* but some more crud like:

"Hold, Malyalara. We've got to find cover. Talking can wait for a better time and place than the shadow of a Qua prison compound." He took her arm as he spoke; threw a nod towards the old town. "There's safety in that rabbit-warren, if we make it."

I ask you, just how do you *throw* a nod? (The Headless Horseman might have done it—but my stars, Alley, isn't your head on tight?)

Malyalara. Hoo-boy, what a name! Why do all the "boys you're developing" think that everybody in the future will have silly names like "Narine of Alveg" or "basilisk-eyed Bherni (s)" I suppose it has juvenile or "mass" appeal. (Ain't that what sells magazines?)

What's so safe about a rabbit-warren, whatever that is.

"If we make it." This phrase may be rather worn, but it's time-proven in adding suspense to this real action science fiction.

No place better than the "shadow of a Qua prison compound" to have all this suspense and action, either.

Well, criticism should be constructive, I think somebody said once.

The author's attempt in ENEMY OF THE QUA to give an alien setting seems to me to be too obvious to convince even the most imaginative of science fiction readers. Words like "stabat", "kabat", and "sabar" do not the future make. However, I suppose this sort of thing is permissible even though sometimes it gets rather ridiculous even to my own pet flebetar.

What's a flebetar? Oh, just a little glang I picked up on my last trip to Xzlaptaleaf . . .

Alan Moore
2707A Speedway
Austin, Texas

Glopdish, anyone? That's cosmikoine for tennis. We were on Xzlaptaleaf too wh

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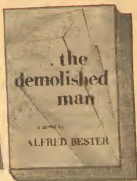
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INTRODUCING the Author

★ *Forrest J. Ackerman* ★

(Concluded from page 2)

RALPH 124C41+ and THE MASTERMIND OF MARS (when a youngster), GRAVY PLANET, THE NEW ADAM, 1984, STAR-BEGOTTEN, LAST MEN IN LONDON and THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES.

I became a literary agent 10 years ago; as literary entrepreneur, I've had the pleasure of collecting 10% for van Vogt, Chad Oliver, Beaumont, Cartmill, Bradley, Asimov, Raymond Jones, Harness, Siodmak, Stapledon, SFWright, Weinbaum, Williamson, Temple, Porges, Grinnell, Taine and many others. THIS ISLAND EARTH was filmed from a book on which I set the original contract.

I drive a dazzler of an "Olds" with power-everything except 4-way cuticle-cutter (yes, it has the automagic mustache-trimmer) only because the \$225,000 Ford *Mystere* won't be on the market till 1965 (And if the sci-fi market isn't any better in '65 than it is in '56, by then I'll be driving a very *old* Olds.)

Years ago I was fanatic about simplifying the English language; now I'm more concerned

with a simple tax form.

I like (especially well) the color green, and the female form (any color). Have attended 12 of the 13 World SF Cons, and the year I missed I nevertheless was at the First International shindig in London. I have been in most of the 48 States and Canada, and 10 European countries (I read, write and speak Esperanto). *Besides* science fiction I love Paris, Marilyn Monroe, Barbara Rush, Susan Hayward, Marlene Dietrich, Kim Novak, Mitzi Gaynor — and Simone Simon.

What's that? Oh, yes. My middle name. The "J" stands for James. I detest it.

I don't drink, smoke, hunt, fish, enjoy sports of any kind either as spectator or participant, approve of prize fights or bull fights, play cards or games, gamble, dance, take part in politics, or care to contribute progeny to posterity. So what am I living for?

I have 5000 books and 10,000 magazines that I enjoy running thru barefoot. Science Fiction.

Forrest J. Ackerman



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